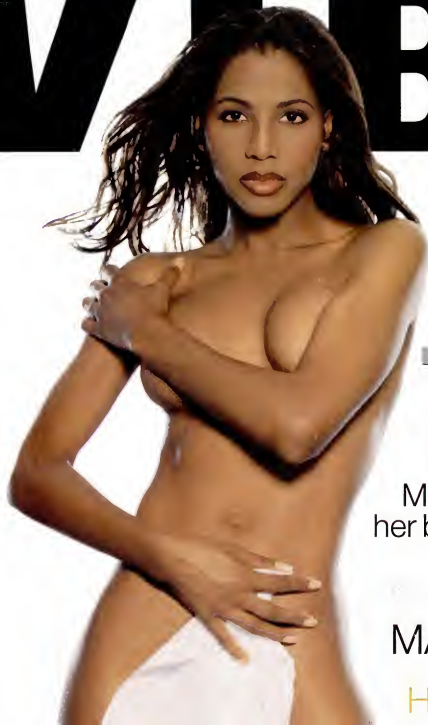


SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE • OUR SIZZLING SUMMER MOVIE PREVIEW

VIBE



TONI!
TONI!
TONI!

Miss Braxton reveals
her bedroom secrets

PLUS:
MASTER P
SCARFACE
HEAVY D
LITTLE

Pete Uller likes all the helmet room in the 1997 Saturn SC2.



A bigger back seat
because of all those trophies.
And more headroom.
(Because of all those trophies.)



In designing our new coupe, we added something especially for people who race their Saturns: more ego room. (Although our engineers call it more headroom.) We also added a lot of things for people who just like to drive in their Saturns.

Like a roomier, quieter interior and a sleek, new body design. And if our new coupes weren't already difficult to ignore, we've also added



daytime running lights. (Even changes made in the name of safety can't help but make the new Saturns more attractive.) The way we



look at it, if you liked our old coupe, chances are you'll like the improvements and changes on our '97 even more. Of course, we decided to keep the trophy-winning, 124-horsepower, dual-overhead-cam engine.

In Solo II competitions, folks like Pete Uller set up courses at local airports and race against the clock. (It's probably fairer than racing against the planes.) Pete and his SC2 have brought home their share of first-place trophies.



THE ICY RACING COUPE

The 1997 SC2, as often

fitted by Saturn's ICY

racing team. One of the

premier teams on the

SCCA Pro Racing

circuit, they'll

be speeding

the new coupe across

many finish lines this

season. And you can

get one a lot like it.

(Pit crew not included.)

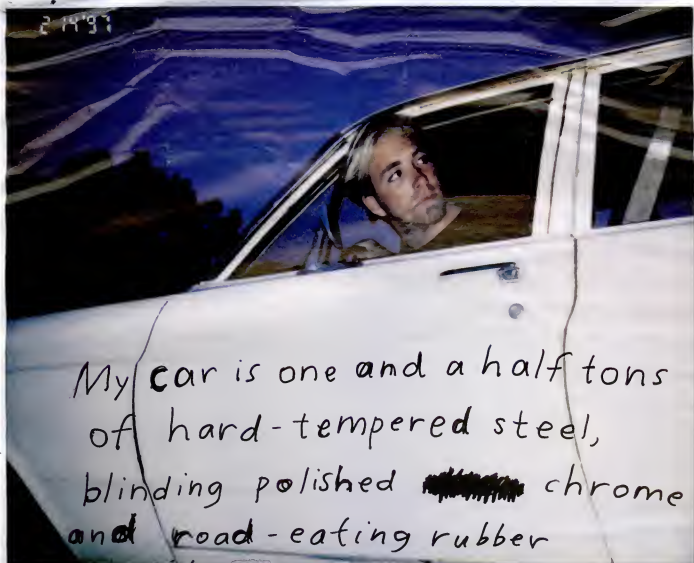
A DIFFERENT KIND of COMPANY. A DIFFERENT KIND of CAR.

This 1997 Saturn SC2 (with alloy wheels) has an MSRP of \$14,415, including retailer prep and transportation. Of course, the total cost will vary seeing how options are extra, as are things like tax and license. We'd be happy to provide more detail at 1-800-522-5000 or look for us on the Internet at <http://saturn.com>. ©1996 Saturn Corporation.

This One



Z01J-26A-C80N



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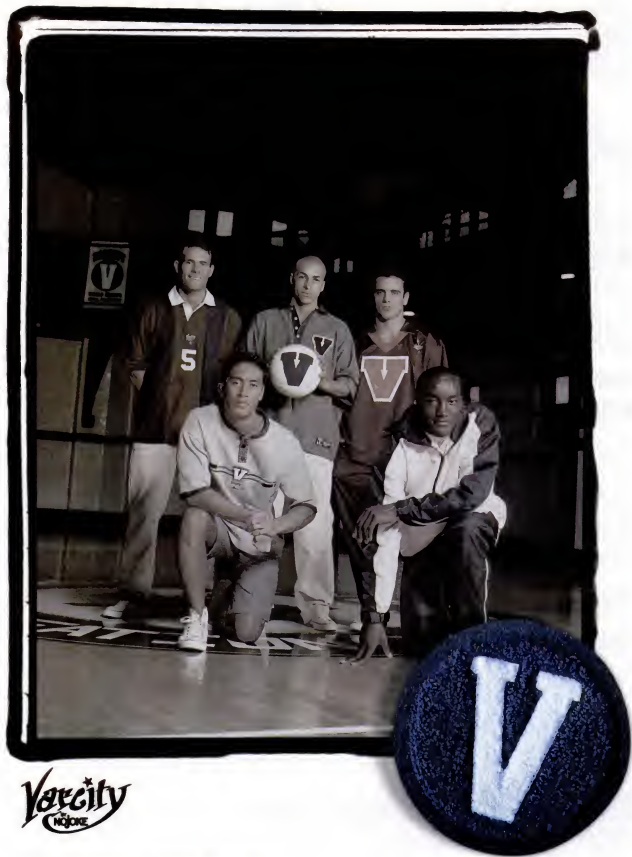
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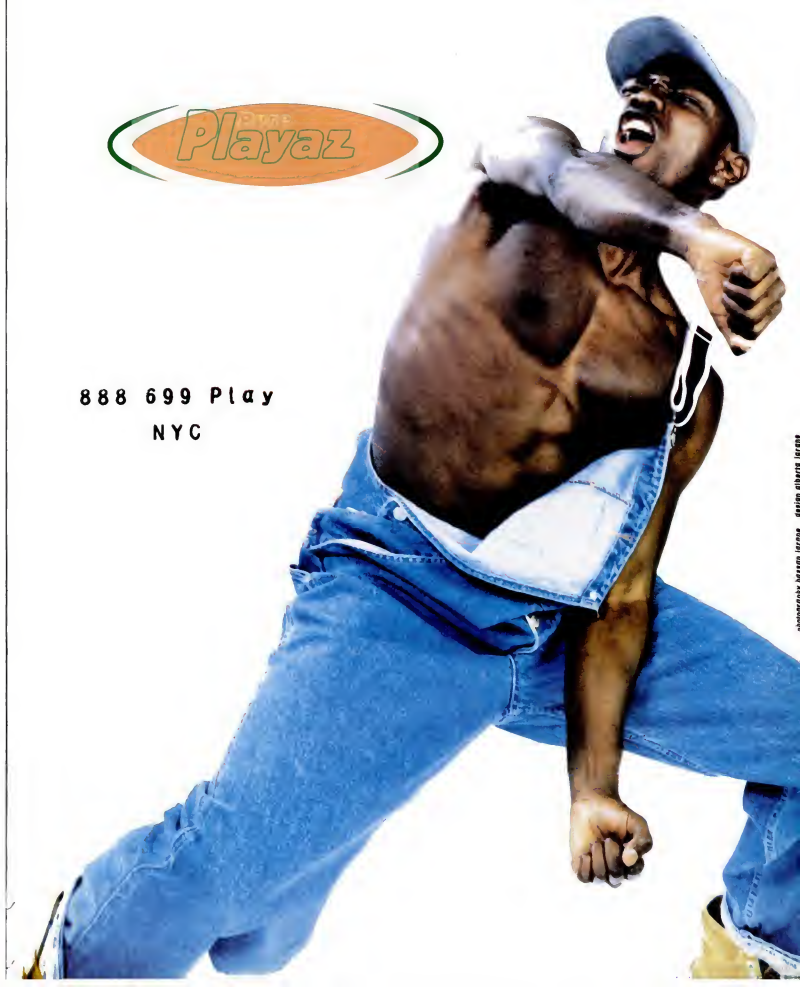
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Categories

Awards and Prizes

CONTEST APPLICATION AND RULES

To enter your original song(s) fill out this application and... *just imagine*

Mail your entry to: **John Lennon Songwriting Contest**
One Havana Avenue, Suite 120
Newark, NJ 07114

Please read all notes carefully, and then sign your name in the space provided. If entrant is under 18 years old, the signature of a parent or guardian is required.

Each entry may consist of

- Completed and signed entry form (or photocopy). All 5 granpees must be original.
- Audio cassettes: containing one song only. 1 to 5 minutes in length.
- Lyrics sheet typed or printed legibly (please include English translation if applicable).
- Check or money order for \$30.00 per song (U.S. currency only) payable to: Lenny Songwriting Contest. If paying by credit card, \$30.00 per song will be charged to your account.

Entries must be postmarked no later than 6/15/07

1 Each song submitted must be contestant's original work. Songs may not exceed five (5) minutes in length. No song previously recorded and released through national distribution in any country will be eligible. Contestant may submit as many songs as he or she wishes in as many categories as he/she wishes, but each entry requires a separate cassette, entry form, lyric sheet, and address fee. No check or money order for multiple entries/categories is permitted. Entrance fee is non-refundable. AISC is not responsible for late, lost, damaged, misdirected postage due, stolen or misdelivered entries.

Seventy-two (72) Winners will receive portable CD players

4. Writers will be chosen by a select panel of judges comprised of retired associates of JISC and JACS, and will be selected on the basis of the following criteria:
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 - b. **Originality:** The essay should be original and not a rehash of information that has already been published.
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 - d. **Impact:** The essay should be one that will be of interest to a broad range of scientists and not just a narrow, specialized audience.
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I have read and understand the rules of The Jake Lennon Songwriting Contest and I accept the terms and conditions of participation. (If contest is under 18 years old, the signature of a parent or guardian is required.)

Signature _____ Date _____

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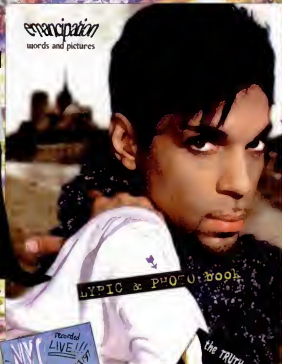
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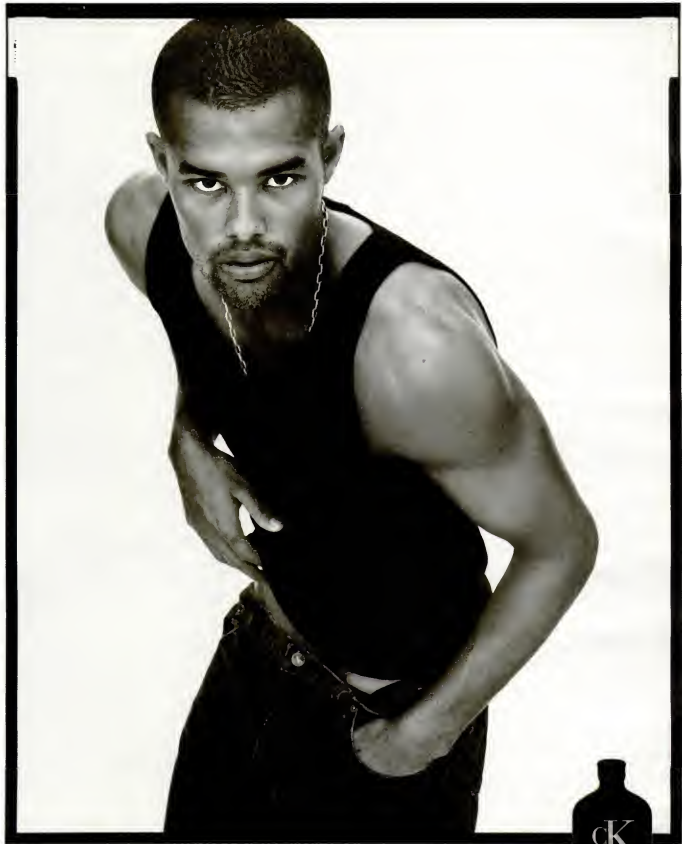
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114 CLIP: JOE

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alpha and omega. *By Darius James*

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Toni Braxton photographed by Daniela Federici; styling by Derick Procope; hair by Marie A. Davis for BAMM; makeup by Gwyneth Mosby for BAMM; nude sheer alpdress by Dolce & Gabbana





i have fantasies about...

baseball.

Sometimes I fantasize that I'm a pitcher who has a rocket-arm.
And my nickname is "Rocket-Arm Pitcher."

I'm also dressed up as a
big green pickle. Probably 'cause
that's what we're always in when I'm pitching
— a pickle.

And I have a little dipping cup of
hot mustard hanging on my belt.

I have no idea what **that** symbolizes.

That's just one of my fantasies though.
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'Cause how else are you going to meet
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some don't. Just something to consider

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Find out what it's like to be him.*

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ABOVE: Master P
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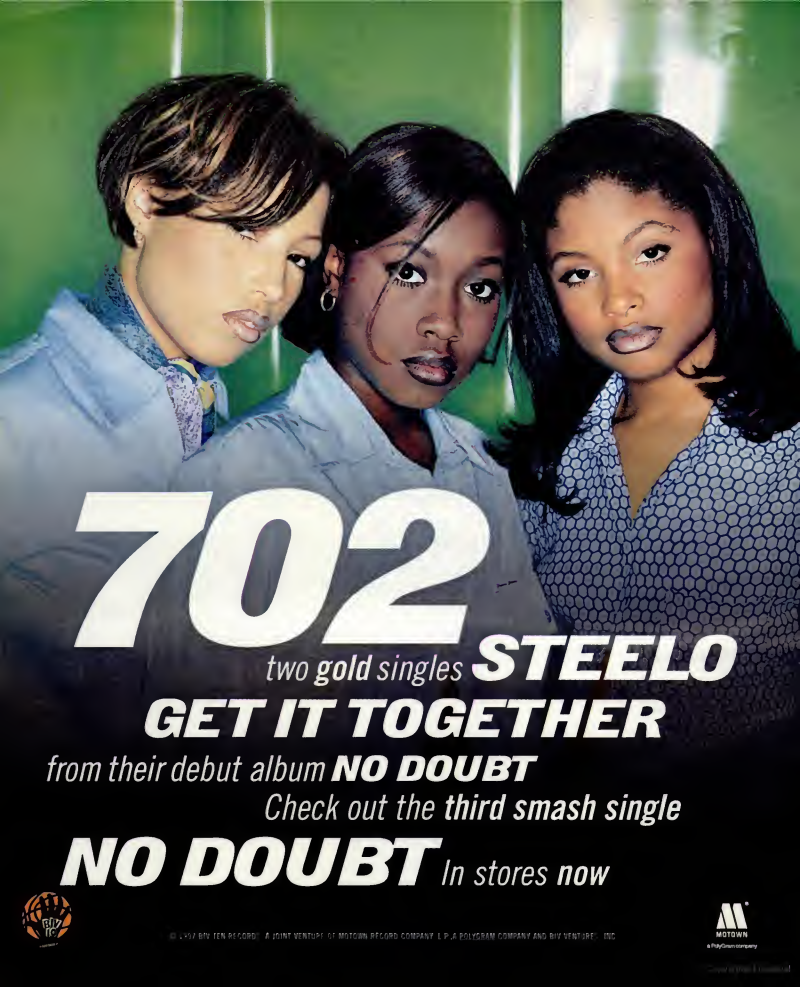
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PRESENTS

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1997

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& THE FUNK ALLSTARS

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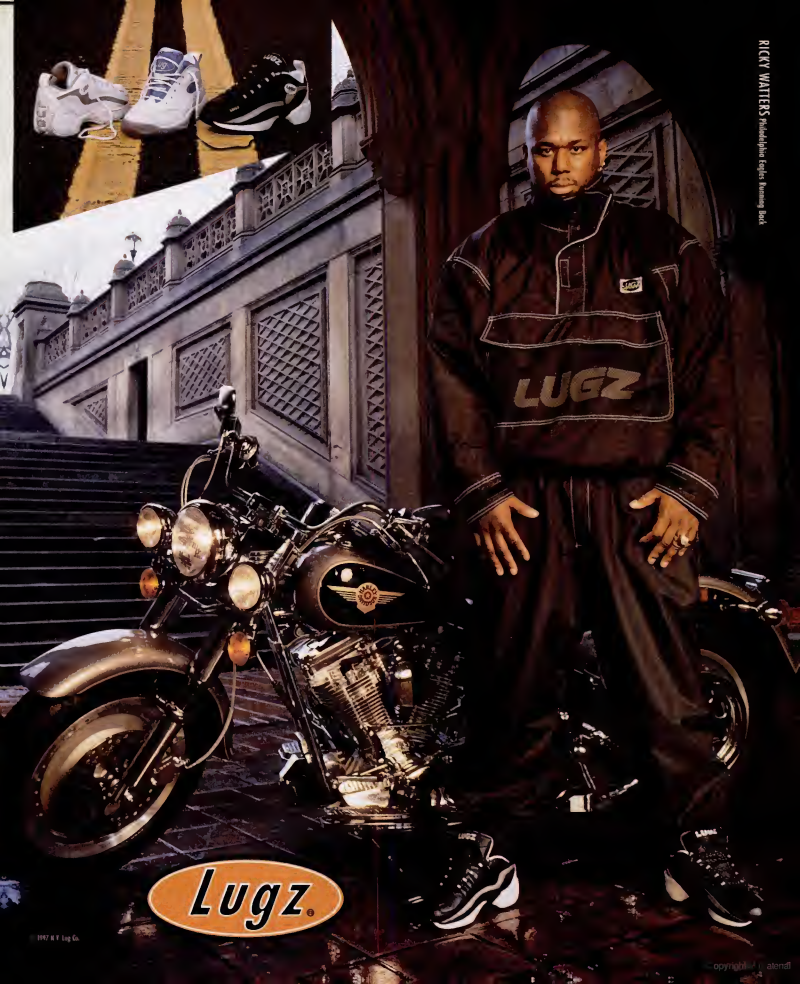
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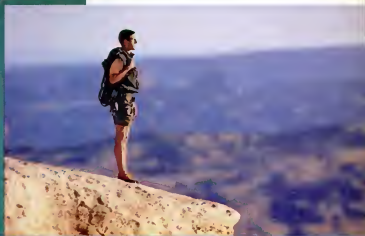
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Darius James hung out with rock 'n' roll legend Little Richard for "The Scream" (page 118). "I think that Little Richard is god, a fun god like Dionysus," says James. "What stands out most to me is his level of compassion for the people around him." The New Jersey native is the author of *Neophobia* (St. Martin's Press) and *That's Blaxploitation: Roots of the Baad-Asses* (St. Martin's Press). He has also written for *Esquire*, *Details*, *High Times*, *Penthouse*, and *Spin*.

Jamil G.S. "wanted to show people in the California love mood" when he photographed the VIBE Style story on bathing suits ("Love Pool," page 126) on a pool deck in a West Hollywood backyard. "Everybody partied and had a good time," said Jamil, a 25-year-old Denmark native. "The whole mood changes when you're out in the sun all the time." Jamil's work has appeared in *The Face*, *i-D*, *George*, and *Tuist*.

Tony Green received a glimpse of a marketing genius when he spoke



DARIUS



JAMIL



TONY



DANA

with Master P ("Stairway to Heaven," page 96). "People think you make a bunch of beats and then bang! it just happens—pop stardom," says the 35-year-old Yonkers, N.Y. native. "But the things that make a difference are more mundane than you'd think. It's amazing how much pragmatism and planning go into gangsta rap." Green is the music writer for the *Florida Times-Union*, has a column, *Grooves*, in *Jazz Times*, and has contributed to *Guitar Player*, *Spin*, and *Optima*.

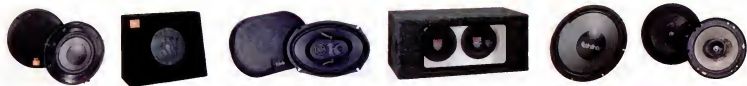
Dana Lixenberg visited Master P's offices in New Orleans to shoot "Stairway to Heaven." (page 96) "I went into it with an open mind to see what I would find, and tried to capture emotion rather than some image," says the Dutch-born photographer. "He's a very mature guy and a strong artist. I knew before that he was someone used to taking control, and that's something that I respect very much." Lixenberg's work has appeared in *New York Magazine*, the *New Yorker*, *Newsweek*, and *British Marie Claire*.

VIBE researcher David Bry opens this month's *Revolutions* section with his *Scarface* review (page 153). He also conducts a conversation between Q-Tip and Adam Yauch for "Keep On Pushin'" (page 104), and keeps an eye on the apocalypse in the Start section *Illuminati Watch* column....VIBE Managing Editor Jesse Washington got schooled on and off the basketball court by female pros while working on "Grudge Match" (page 106). He wrote the feature on present-day slavery in VIBE's November 1996 issue....Exum captured the basketball battle of the sexes on-camera. She has worked with *The New York Times Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Entertainment Weekly*....VIBE Editorial Assistant Shani Saxon chilled with Heavy D for "His Own Thing" (page 112). She also writes the In the Mix columns....Donald Graham, who photographed Heavy D, has shot for *Spin*, *Vanity Fair*, *French Photo*, and *British Premiere* and contributed to *Sensual Images* (Pie Books) and numerous exhibitions.

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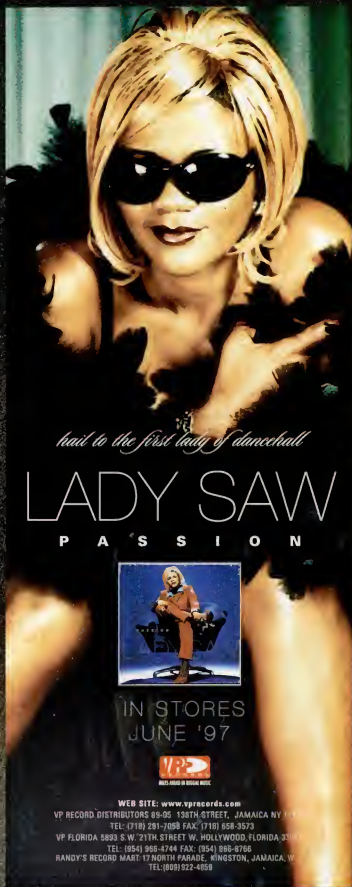
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PERRY ELLIS AMERICA



REST IN PEACE, BIG POPPA

After the Notorious B.I.G. was senselessly murdered on March 9, VIBE received hundreds of letters from fans grieving the loss of one of hip hop's most beloved rappers. Many who wrote found themselves questioning the violent nature of some rap music. Here are some of those letters.

I don't understand all this East/West Coast feuding and this "West Side killer" crap that Ice Cube is screaming, but I wish that it would cease. I love rap, and I'm so glad that I grew up listening to Grandmaster Flash and the Sugar Hill Gang, because some of the negative stuff that's out now shouldn't even be laid on wax. I get so sick of all this jailhouse, morgue, and graveyard posturing on the albums and in the videos. Rest in peace, Tupac and Biggie.

Doreen Van Lee
Edwardsville, IL

I'm 26 years old, and to hear about another brother my age dying for no reason makes me sick. I don't understand why we can't get along. It seems as though the more people preach about our loving and respecting each other, the more hatred we have toward one another. I don't understand killing over East vs. West, blue rag vs. red rag, or which "hood you're from. In reality we're all one, fighting the same battle.

Eddie Jones
Oakland, CA

I am writing this letter to apologize for a brutal act that I committed. I am the individual who is responsible for the death of Christopher Wallace. I am the individual responsible for the death of Tupac Shakur. I am the driving force behind the exploitation of violence in

music and televised media. Who am I? I am the hip hop consumer. Once again, now that the Notorious B.I.G. too has been brutally gunned down, I heard people commenting on the media's coverage and hyping of a dispute between the two coasts. This time, I had to stand up and be held accountable for what I have created and perpetuated. I helped make Tupac's "Thug Life." I bought his records,

money into this artist and his record label's growing bank account, and did not demand that he and his label be held accountable for what was being created. I never questioned the lyric content of Biggie's songs. All I cared about was that they were banger'.

Garrett E. Jenkins
Harlem, NY

What disturbs me most about the murder of the incredible

"I am responsible for the death of Christopher Wallace. I am responsible for the death of Tupac Shakur. Who am I? I am the hip hop consumer."

which had public displays of anger and hostility directed toward other rap artists. I did not publicly question him for returning to glorifying a lifestyle that he himself said led people to incarceration or death. I willingly deposited

Notorious B.I.G. is the nonchalant way it was announced by the press. CNN mentioned that "another gangsta rapper" was gunned down in L.A., as if this type of thing is expected from rap artists—and black people in general. Though I am deeply

disturbed by the death of Biggie, I also feel that we as blacks are at a serious crossroads. We have to find a way to prove to ourselves that we are above this type of behavior, and that we deserve to live and be successful. Some feel that Biggie was not a positive model, but he was far more positive than "thug niggaz" who tote guns to prove that they are men. We must realize that using guns shows only how weak we are and how little we care about ourselves. Rest in peace, Biggie. I hope your death was not in vain.

J. McNeal
New York, NY

It hurts me deeply when people die for no reason. Both Tupac and Biggie were someone's son. I blame the media for taking a personal disagreement between two rappers and creating a bicoastal war. Images of Death Row and Bad Boy on magazine covers added to the fire. I know that companies like VIBE are here to make money, but now two of our talented brothers are dead. It's not fair that their families and friends have to mourn two men who were both too young to die.

Candice C. Pinder
Hollywood, FL

I was deeply saddened by the

murder of Biggie Smalls. I'm tired of seeing brothers from any coast dying. It's no longer a bicoastal rap war, it's about people who have no regard for human life. We have to stop this behavior before it's too late. Biggie will be greatly missed.

Fredric Cooper
Rialto, CA

I wanted to cry when I heard about Biggie's murder, but I was too filled with anger. I was angry at my brothers for taking the life of yet another powerful black male in America. When will it stop? Everyone is claim-



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APRIL COCA-COLA "SOUL BOWL" RESULTS: 112 made it into the playoffs by winning the division with their jam "Cupid" which scored 40.7% of the listener's votes. However, the game was close with Ray J's single "Let It Go" winning second place, Yvette Michelle coming in next with her song "I'm Not Feeling You" and Deja Gray following closely with their jam "Sittin' On Top of The World".



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ing to represent a coast when, as black people, we really don't own anything. I loved both rappers and hoped that they would make a song together in the name of making money, and kill the beef that brought them to their demise. Black males need to stop killing each other—because we only hurt ourselves in the end.

*Terance Brown
Kingsire, SC*

Well, once again we have another senseless death in the hip hop community. Biggie was one of my favorite rappers because he always represented Brooklyn to the fullest. Biggie never forgot where he came from or the people who helped him become successful. When are black people going to wake the hell up? It's a shame that six months after Tupac was murdered, nothing has changed.

*Ginette Roach
Brooklyn, NY*

HER LIFE

Your interview with Mary J. Blige ["All Woman," by dream hampton, April] was all that! Now my impression of Mary has changed for the better. I remember hearing an interview with Mary on the radio last year and thinking she's got a real bad attitude. Now I understand why she behaved the way she did, and I'm happy she has a newfound inner peace. I love Mary's music and the feeling she puts into a song. There's no doubt that I'll be first in line to buy her new album.

*Laflaca
Brentwood, NY*

For dream hampton to say that Mary J. Blige reminds her of Aretha is crazy, because there is no comparison. Mary barely holds her own against today's young singers. I find it hard to believe that Mary is considered the Queen of Hip Hop Soul. After all, Michel'le was hitting hard way before Mary. And she did so without horrid covers of great songs. Twenty years from now, we'll see how well Mary's work holds up.

*Chris Williams
Miami, FL*

I know Mary J. is trying to change her style and appearance, but the cover photo of her is tacky! Hello, doesn't anybody know how to do touch-ups? You can see her blue veins and scrapes on her legs. I know the magazine is trying to "keep it real," but you should try to "keep it right."

*Diva
didre.boone@gartner.com*

I must commend dream hampton for bringing the readers the other side of Mary J. Blige. She was depicted in a way she's never been presented before. Mary really let readers into a little bit of her world. As a fan of Mary's music, whether she's working with Sean "Puffy" Combs or with other producers, I'll always be behind her 100 percent. She will always reign supreme as the Queen of Hip Hop Soul. Although others have tried to imitate, there hasn't been a female artist yet who comes close to taking her title.

*Camille Grayson
Chicago, IL
cgrayson@jfcchasi.org*

FIGHT THE POWER

It was wonderful to read Diana Reiss-Koncar's article about the Zapatista struggle ["The War Next-door," April]. However, she failed to mention that Emiliano Zapata was not only a Nahua Indian but was a *zambo* as well. In some Latin American cultures, *brothas* and *sistas* of Indian-and-black descent are called *zambos*, and Zapata had a black mother. We all have to realize that the people of southern Mexico are our people too, and we must all come together to create a universal change.

*Omar Maulana
Long Beach, CA*

STARS AND BARS

I am a native Southerner who was taught to respect the Confederate flag ["Red, White & Black," Start, April] as part of our heritage and as a symbol of the freedom we fought for. Like Patrick Griffin, I also object to "some black people (and some whites) lumping us in with hate organizations." I have never known or even met anyone associated with the Ku Klux Klan. Many people in the South are sick and tired of the KKK using a proud southern symbol to spread their hatred. The Klan does not maintain southern traditions, they serve Satan. True Southerners would like the rest of the country to disassociate us, and our flag, from those types of evil organizations.

*Walter Carson
Acworth, GA*

AROUND-THE-WAY OUT

It's about time VIBE took a break from the so-called gangsta rappers as cover stories to give a man who speaks of family values some light ["No Time to Chill," by Bönz Malone, March]. L.L.'s not afraid of being a role model and still rips the mike like a true hip hopper should. He definitely represents the true



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meaning of hip hop, and it's about time he gets his props. I've been a BIG fan since I was nine years old and plan on being one till I'm 99.

*D.W. Cool J.
New Orleans, LA*

JAM ON IT

I find it disheartening that society today still focuses so much on issues of color. How can anyone say that Jay Kay is "stealing the soul" ["Son of Soul," by Michael Odell, March]? Jamiroquai's sound should not be classified as soul or anything else, because it's much more than that. Jamiroquai are not an all-white band (and it shouldn't matter if they were), and they obviously worked very hard to get to where they are. They deserve every bit of success, and I hope they make it to that next level. To critique them is out of pure jealousy. Their music is indescribable. We should all just close our eyes and let the songs speak for themselves.

*Natasha C. Crusty
Stamford, CT*

Jamiroquai are a band that truly inspire. Jay Kay and Toby Smith are music and lyric geniuses. They have been influenced by legendary black musicians, but Jamiroquai shouldn't be persecuted because of it. It shouldn't matter that Jay doesn't look like the typical R&B balladeer, because the fact is, he creates infectious grooves and provides socially conscious messages for everyone. He's not the great white hype, he's a brilliant artist.

*Dacia Ticoatli Higges
Antioch, CA*

A DJ SAVED MY LIFE

I want to thank you for writing about the No. 1 DJ, Funkmaster Flex [Clip, by Christian Ee, March]. For those heads out there who don't know, Flex is to deejaying what Rakim and Nas are to emceeing. He brings nothing but the ruckus, whether he be at a party or on a mix tape. Living in the hip hop wasteland of South Florida, it was nice to find out what's coming new from him and to have something to look forward to. Nothing can be heard here except for mainstream and booty-shake music! I'm looking for some new hype stuff, and I know Flex is the one to give it to me.

*D.J. B Low
West Palm Beach, FL*

RED HEAD

I'm glad that you covered the Redman video [VIBEArts, March], but I'm sad that you didn't challenge

your readers to take a closer look at what actually takes place. A black man's head is served on a platter to white people! I'm sorry, but I can't see the humor in this video, because that would be a way of avoiding responsibility for what is happening around us. We need to examine and reject those images that reinforce our position in society as an underclass that white people can eat for dinner.

*Krith Stenart
Brooklyn, NY*

ON AND ON

Thank you for the review of the intriguing and unique Erykah Badu [Revolutions, by Karen R. Good, March]. It is so refreshing to hear lyrics written by a woman who doesn't exploit her sexuality and who doesn't boast on how much money she spends on Versace and Moët. It may seem bold to actually be natural in the music industry today, but it's about time consumers support artists who exemplify and promote positive images of the African-American woman. Keep that incense burning, Ms. Badu!

*Kiamessa Sims
Pittsburgh, PA*

Thank you so much for the beautiful review of Erykah Badu's album. I absolutely love her music because it brings back a divine feminine spirituality that our culture had lost. Her music has blessed us at a time when our community needs the most healing. It presents a balance to the gun-toting gangsta and the Dolce & Gabbana/Versace-loving images that seem to dominate right now.

*Adrienne E. Jackson
Miami, FL*

CORRECTIONS:

- In "My 5 Death Row Story" ["All That Glitters," by Rob Marnott], Police Officer Easter holding necklace photo by Michael Cawfield/AP. Sage Knight in suit photo by Alastair Thain. Sage Knight photo by Finney Barrett/Globe Photos. Michael Harris photo courtesy of DEA. Tupac Shakur photo by Shana Ross.
- In "May's 20 Questions," Tyra Banks photo by Bill Davilla/Ketna, and Too Short photo by Michael Benabib/Ketna.
- The photo of the Artist Formerly Known as Prince in April's In the Mix was taken by Stella Magloire.
- Photo No. 8 in April's In the Mix Too is Offie Woodson, formerly of the Temptations.

VIBE encourages mail and photographs from readers. Please send letters to VIBE MAIL, 215 Lexington Avenue, 6th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10016. Or send E-mail to vibe@vibe.com. Send photos to VIBE YOUR BEST SHOT (same address). Include your full name, address, and daytime phone number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Photo submissions will become the property of VIBE and will not be returned.

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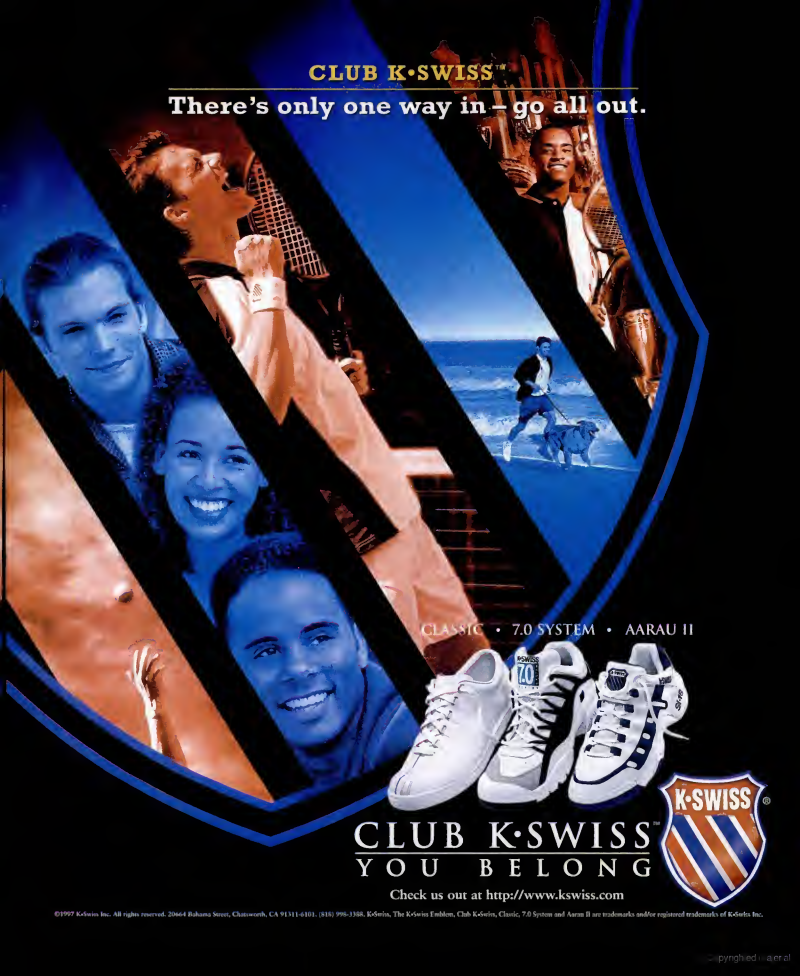
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Critical Beatdown

Recently, some acts such as Jody's placed a breakthrough in the duplication when they successfully cloned a man unsuspecting their sheep. Just a few weeks later, cool the rapists doubled their pleasure with a lab monkey. Thank God, then, that President Clinton soon after barred the use of federal funds to investigate the cloning of human beings, thereby saving us all from having to live among inferior department-store knockoffs.

However, those of us who listen to hip hop and its shallow cousin, modern R&B—are being exposed to a similar plague: Sonik Klonin' Syndrome. The wholesale jacking of Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five's "The Message" as a support system for Puffy's inferior (and materialistic) lyrics on "Can't Nobody Hold Me Down"

is ignorant. To hear KRS-One (on the joint "Heartbeat," off his new LP) flipping uninspired couplets over a loop from Treacherous Three's "Feel the Heartbeat" is bananas. And Warren G's "I Shot the Sheriff," which replicates EPMD's classic "Strictly Business," is the most flagrant case of plagiarism since you got busted with Cliff's Notes in the ninth grade.

But how can any rap fan question such tactics? After all, EPMD's "Strictly" reworked Eric Clapton's reinterpretation of a Bob Marley classic, and T3's "Feel" took its beat from Taana Gardner. Ultimately, though, these landmark recordings are in line with hip hop's tradition of digging in the crates, finding a rare groove or an

element of a popular song, and blowing it into a unique mothing. Nowadays, the full-blown lifting of hip hop hits past—with little or no creative embellishment—has become the rule.

On "Champaign," a dirty from his *Roll With the New LP*, comedian Chris Rock satirizes this hip-hop formula by enlisting a bevy of singers to coo "I love champaign" over the beat from Run-DMC's 1986 parody "King of Rock." It's an effective parody, smirking at the popularizers of successful yet booty rap and R&B. But only if hip hop listeners begin educating their ears and raising their standards will this music again live up to its boomastic legacy. Maybe it's time the Big Willie shepherds of the rap game took a cue from Mr. Clinton and shut this cloning shit down.

Chairman Mao

It was all so simple then—clockwise from bottom left: Mike G., DJ Kayslay, Dollar Bill, Tank, and J.T. (with radio), circa 1981

Go-go, No Go

Violence threatens Chocolate City's music scene

Washington, D.C. police officer Brian T. Gibson was murdered on February 5 while sitting in his squad car at a traffic light. The four shots fired not only ended the young officer's life but also seriously wounded the city's legendary go-go music scene.

The man charged with the murder, Marthell Nathaniel Dean, 23, had just been tossed out of the Ibox nightclub, a multistory building on the city's northwest side that had been a popular go-go venue since the late '80s.

Why Dean shot Gibson is a mystery; he said he was too drunk to know what he was doing. But the fact that Dean had been inside the Ibox getting pumped full of the Backyard Band's hyped beats, as well as booze, was apparently reason enough for the city to cite the club with liquor-license violations and shut it down within a week of the shooting.

"A cop got shot on that night, and they had to put it on something," says Terence Cooper, Backyard's manager. "That dude was responsible for his own actions."

But many neighbors were pleased that the club was no more. Chief of Police Larry Soules bemoaned about cracking down on other go-go spots. And a city council member quickly introduced a bill—still in deliberations—that will make it easier to close clubs with violent histories. Even the Ibox's landlord, Zina Greene, was elated the club was closed down. "This neighborhood doesn't need that. I never would have signed a lease with them today," she said.



Storefront remembrance: Officer Brian T. Gibson

This is not the first time D.C.'s percussion-driven funk music has been under the gun. Since its mid-'70s inception, go-go has been plagued by numerous incidents, often instigated by members of gangs or crews. (Police say that Dean was a member of the Seventh and O Street Crew.) The mayhem prompted the city to begin instituting teen curfews in the early '90s to keep youths away from go-gos, and many club owners refused to book go-go acts.

In 1988 the musicians tried to keep the peace by forming the Go-Go Posse, a group featuring members of Experience Unlimited (E.U.) and Rare Essence, and the Godfather of Go-go, Chuck Brown. They recorded a song and video, "D.C. Don't Stand for Dodge City." More recently, bands have staged fund-raisers for AIDS and the homeless, and have offered to do a benefit concert for Officer Gibson's wife.

"Right now, these bands are being blamed for something they have no control over," says Chuck Brown, whose 1979 No. 1 R&B smash "Bustin' Loose" is considered to be the first national go-go hit. "It happened outside the club. It hurts me to see these bands being blamed. And it hurts me to see violence."

Mensah Dean

Breakout

En Vogue lose a voice

The superwoman vocal group known as En Vogue are up and running again—minus one of their key players. Dawn Robinson has stepped away from En Vogue's successful four-part foundation, which over the past seven years have been responsible for numerous hits, from 1990's "Hold On" to the recent platinum-seller "Don't Let Go (Love)."

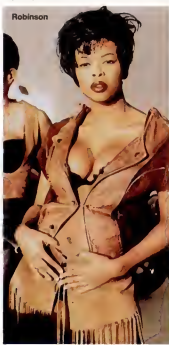
"I am proud to have been part of En Vogue from the beginning," says Robinson. "Now our paths are leading us in different directions, giving us the chance to try new things."

Robinson is currently working on her debut solo album for Dr. Dre's Aftermath Records, which will be executive produced by the "head ringer" himself. The LP, which she says will range from standard R&B to "ghetto metal," is expected to be out late this year.

Although Robinson left before the completion of En Vogue's as-yet-untitled latest project—the group's first full-length album in more than three years—her vocals will appear on about half of the songs. The remaining crew members, who say they'll continue as a trio, have nothing but words of encouragement.

"Working with Dawn has been a tremendous experience for us all," said the band in a statement. "We wish her all the best on her new effort." Leaving such a powerful franchise, however, is no guarantee that the champagne will keep flowing like Niagara Falls. EV member Terry Ellis dropped a solo album in 1995 titled *Southern Gal* that now lines bargain bins across the country. Dawn: Good luck, girlfriend.

Dyanni Saxon



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• THE SO-CALLED NEW POOR

According to the latest Census Bureau statistics, Hispanics have replaced African-Americans as the ethnic group with the highest poverty rate in the United States. In 1995 the median household income increased for all Americans except the 27 million Latino residents. Academics who study the Hispanic population (the country's fastest-growing ethnic group) cite drastically reduced blue-collar jobs and high drop-out rates among Latinos in high school and college as some of the causes for this economic decline.



• BULLY BULLY

When *A Lot on It*, the debut LP from West Coast rapper the Gooch, drops this summer, the real attention will be on the other bully, Ice Cube, who makes a guest appearance on the opening track. "A lot of men are scared to say it, but deep in their heart, they didn't really have a problem with Ice," says the Gooch. "What's Love Got to Do With It was one-sided, and I basically wanted to give Ice a chance to show he's a nice guy."



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Stern Warnings

Controversial jock jocks hip-hop crisis

He's no big fan of rap, but that didn't stop Howard Stern from getting dead in the middle of the controversy surrounding the deaths of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls. The day after Biggie's March 18 funeral, Stern pulled together some of rap's old and new heads—Melle Mel, Grandmaster Caz, Luther Campbell, the Boo-Yaa T.R.I.B.E., The Dogg Pound's Daz, Chubb Rock, and UTFO's Kangel—to, as Stern put it, "straighten this whole mess out."

The group, who squeezed into the shock jock's tiny Manhattan studio at WXRK-FM (K-Rock), waxed poetic on everything from the so-called hip-hop wars to ghettos, gangs, and deranged fans.



But it wouldn't have been a Howard Stern affair without some of his racially loaded, tongue-in-cheek humor. With African drums beating in the background and a chorus of "yessahs" from his sidekicks, Stern opened his summit with a five-minute speech urging black rappers to stop fighting—"because you're making a lot of white people nervous"—and "get back to what's really important: the barbecues."

Naturally, no real conclusions were reached. But Melle Mel did offer up a way to distinguish between a credible gangsta rapper and

a money-grabbin' faker. "Let him say his rhyme. Then as soon as he says something about shooting somebody, shoot him," said a deadpan Mel. "If he screams out or clutches his wound, that means he ain't worthy of being a hardcore rapper."

Denene Millner

Etc....Etc....Etc.....

Buggin': On March 24, Keith "Guru" Elam, the 35-year-old frontman of rap group Gang Starr, was arrested in his suburban Long Island, N.Y. home. Elam reportedly beat a female friend with a beer bottle because she criticized his rhymes. "She was stating that the lyrics to his songs spoke out against white people and [that] she sees him with white women," said Detective Sgt. Lucy Guido. Is this how the son of Boston's first black municipal court judge keeps it real?...Back in effect: Tisha Campbell, star of Fox Television's *Martin*, has returned to the set of the show after accusing Martin Lawrence of sexual harassment a few months earlier. Cool! Lord knows that we can't live without that quality program's all-star cast....Say what?: Bill and Camille Cosby are considering suing the *National Enquirer* because of a story they say falsely described Mrs. Cosby as being seduced and on the verge of a nervous breakdown after the January 16 murder of their son, Ennis....I want my MTV...to stop frontin': In a March 18 special report, the music channel was loudly hyping that it would reveal to the world the prime suspect in the Tupac murder case. But actually, the *Los Angeles Times* beat it to the punch, naming Orlando Anderson as the prime suspect weeks earlier.

Studio Time

In the lab with Chico and El DeBarge

Fourteen years after composing the hopelessly romantic black wedding anthem "Time Will Reveal" for his family group DeBarge, producer/songwriter El DeBarge is in N.Y.C.'s Battery Studios, putting the finishing touches on his brother Chico's second album.

"Our oldest brother, Bobby, who was in Switch, passed on a legacy that we call the DeBarge sound," says El, 35, looking slicker than a high-rolling riverboat gambler. "It's the formula we follow in the studio."

Chico, the youngest of ten children, was never a part of the family songbird troupe, although he did release a self-titled solo album in 1986. In reviving the DeBarge sound for a generation raised on looped-up sounds—BLACKstreet sample plenty of that angelic DeBarge groove on their latest album—the brothers plan to combine the prowess of two generations of soul. "It's going to sound like grape Kool-Aid with a slice of lemon," jokes El.

One of the first tracks the mack duo completed was "Superman," a dark, slow, futuristic-sounding joint. "Whether we use samples or just play our instruments, we try to create something that's rich and pure," says El. "My job as the producer is to allow Chico to blossom into the artist I know he can be. It's also my job not to crowd or overshadow him."

Another dose track sculpted by the siblings is "No Guarantee." "I wanted to write a song about a simple man who's not trying to live that Big Willie lifestyle—and about a man trying to explain his ways to a woman," says Chico, age 27.

Glistening with El's slow piano grooves and Chico's butta lyrics, the project promises to go where current soulsters fear to tread. "Other producers make tracks without feeling or emotion," says El. "We create music that has heart."

Michael A. Gonzales



Chico (center), El (right)



Photo by [illegible]

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Can't Stop the Prophets

Public Enemy strike back with new LP

Fans who believed the hype and lost faith in black CNN's No. 1 correspondents, Public Enemy, can go get a late pass. Long Island's prophets of rage are back in the studio with the usual hard-hitting suspects: Bomb Squad head Hank Shocklee on production and Chuck D on throat, plus Flavor Flav, Flav's clock, Terminator X, the S1Ws, and Professor Griff (who was ejected from the group in 1989 for making anti-Semitic statements). "Reinstituting Griff was a natural thing," says Chuck. "There were some discrepancies and in time they were cleared up."

The collective are due to release their sixth LP, *Afraid of the Dark*, in the fall. An eight-week winter tour is also in the works. "There's a lot

Public Enemy, circa 1989



of people right now that's waiting to hear from us," says a reborn Flavor Flav. "I just want to deliver back to my peoples."

"My commitment with this tour is to make every single night we play an event," says Chuck, "like a big boxing match."

Chuck D, owner of the Sony-distributed Slam Jam Recordings, has been a very busy man. Besides releasing last year's solo effort *Autobiography of Mistachuck*, he has founded the Rap Station Hip Hop Nation Web site (which he describes as "the ESPN of rap and hip hop") and will soon be dropping a book titled *Fight the Power*.

"Public Enemy is visionaries, not reactionaries," says Chuck. "I think that's one thing that people fail to realize. We don't die—we multiply." He's still a "rhyme animal."

Gabriel Alvarez

Sound Check

Bobbito plays the tracks, Tony Bennett states the facts

Ma dukes was checking for Tony Bennett way before she squeezed me out. Mr. Bennett's career spans more than five decades, during which he's dropped well over 25 albums, earned a couple of Grammys, and accomplished a slew of other jaw-dropping feats. Mr. Bennett's most recent LP, *Tony Bennett on Holiday*, pays homage to immortal jazz vocalist Billie Holiday.

He asked me not to play him anything "contemporary," so the Mobb Deep "Godfather Part III" cassette single stayed in the bag. I should've told him that they're from Queens like he is.

• Tom Jones — "Looking out My Window"

B: Stetsasonic sampled the break on this for their classic "Go Stefa." It's a Tom Jones tune.

T.B.: I think music is either good or it isn't. It's a good dance number—he can really sing for the rhythm and blues feel. I grew up in the school of African-American music with artists like Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Nat King Cole. I thank God, 'cause this was the golden era of music. But any comments I make on a tune might sound insulting when comparing them to original blues singers like Big Joe Turner—or for gospel, "Sister" Rosetta Tharpe. Today, gospel is so commercial; I'm offended by that. I think it's a new form of Uncle Tom. True gospel is sung by someone who really believes in God, like Mahalia Jackson.

B: In hip hop, the more spiritually and emotionally inspired a record is, the less commercially viable it becomes.

T.B.: It's really an injustice. In my era, Nat King Cole would make a record and it would go right to No. 1 'cause it was the best record. The excellence of the artist was first and foremost. Louis Armstrong became popular because he was an incredible performer. Now, whatever is marketed becomes popular.

• Stevie Wonder — "You Are the Sunshine of My Life"

T.B.: I compare this to painting. There's so much modern art that disappoints me when compared to the masters. Every once in a while, though, there'll be a modern artist that



shoots out, and I'll say, That's a good one. Stevie Wonder is tremendous. He deserves to be on top.

• Sarah Vaughan — "Lullaby of Birdland" T.B.: Sarah Vaughan. When you listen to her or Billy Eckstine... those are my idols. Sarah was a good piano player too. The only two singers around today that I put in her category are Shirley Horn and Natalie Cole. I have a tune by Shirley called "Don't Let the Sun Catch You Crying"—it gives me goose bumps every time I listen [to it].

• Harry Connick Jr. and Branford Marsalis — "You Go to My Head"

T.B.: That's Harry Connick. That's good.

B: I know a lot of jazz came out of the Big Band era, but I really like stripped-down jazz. T.B.: So do I. I went to the Grammys the past five years with just my trio. There's marketing, and there's performance. I deal with performance.

B: I like that joint "Moonglow" you did with k.d. lang.

T.B.: We won a Grammy for that album.

B: What do you think of "You Go to My Head"?

T.B.: That's a great standard. A song like that never dies. Sinatra made the definitive version; I've recorded it twice. A record company will say it's old, but I can go anywhere in the world, even where they don't speak English, and they'll ask for this tune.

bullets point-blank news



• ANGIE GOT SKILLS

KRS-One's latest album, *I Got Next*, has some Latina flavor. Angie Martinez, a sassy on-air personality for New York's (WQHT) Hot 97 FM, makes her debut as a rapper on the song "Heartbeat." The tune, which also features Redman, was originally planned as just an interlude. But after receiving positive feedback, the jam went full length. "I [was, like] Hey, we'll try it," says Martinez. "But if it's weak, don't put it out there." Too bad most rappers don't have this same philosophy.



• UN-CIVIL RIGHTS

Last January, the group that persuaded California to pass Proposition 209 struck another blow against affirmative action with the formation of the American Civil Rights Institute (ACRI). Located in Sacramento, ACRI will assist other organizations and federal representatives in educating the public about racial and gender preferences, as well as monitoring Proposition 209. "We will make sure that government treats everyone equally," says ACRI executive director Jennifer Nelson. "And that's what civil rights is all about."

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It All Makes SenseSM

Frankie Cuts the Rug

Tango dance craze exposed



First Al Pacino did it in the seductive 1992 flick *Scent of a Woman*, then Dr. Dre in last year's "Been There Done That" video. Now L'Oréal is marketing it as the inspiration for its spring cosmetics line. Forget that cute Macarena number—In 1997, it's all about the tango.

"Tango is very sexy, not because of the closeness but because of the connection you must make with your partner," explains instructor Valeria Solomonoff. "It is very sexy to see a man focused."

And focused you must be, for this sophisticated dance ain't easy. Just ask DJ/producer/Latin sensation Frankie Cutlass, who recently accompanied me to New York's Broadway Ballet school for a lesson. Cutlass is known for his hardcore beats on hits like "Puerto Rico" and his latest single "The Cypher," so I was a little unsure as to how he would feel about dipping and diving.

"I wanted to do this," said the colossal Cutlass. And he was no slouch on the dance floor, impressing both me and the teacher with his silky moves. "Yo, I could do this for two more hours," he said, having made an easy transition from strobe lights and nightclubs to ballet bars and studio mirrors. "This is great. I'm in love." Yo, if Frankie Cutlass is feelin' it, you know the tango is officially in vogue.

Andréa M. Duncan



Duncan, Cutlass

VIBE's Illuminati Watch

You ever get the feeling you're being watched? Like, you know how surveillance cameras are monitoring most public property by now, right? So, what about Sinbad? The guy's everywhere. I swear, every time I see that goateed face peering down from some billboard, I can feel the holy beast's stare on the back of my neck. Stand-up, sitcoms, award shows, advertisements; major motion pictures featuring country clubs, cowboys, and Santa Claus. How's he got such omnipresent juice? He still ain't ever said nothin' funny. Seems like Sinbad's got friends in some very high places.

But here at VIBE's Illuminati-Buster headquarters, our motto is, We watch the watchers. When we learned that Sinbad's new book is subtitled *Yeah, I Know Everything, we were on the case like the X-Files' Mulder and Scully. Believe it or not, we have uncovered a trove of startling information.*

1) In 1984—a chillingly Orwellian "coincidence"—Sinbad made his first headlines as the runner-up on Ed "Big Brother" McMahon's new program of national mind-control, *Star Search*.

2) In 1987 Sinbad debuted on the Cosby-produced *A Different World* as Walter Oakes, a "benevolent" figure of authority in the *new order* regime. Think about it.

3) Hold onto your seats: After a meticulous analysis of the letters that make up Sinbad's name, our crack research staff has discovered a devious message encoded within: Sin. Bad.

After compiling our evidence, we tried to confront Sinbad to tell him we were hip to his dastardly connections. But the guy is completely untouchable. "He's in Barbados," a publicist would

Hot-N-Gats: Sinbad



say. "He's on his way to Colorado." *Sure.* Sources tell us that more regular hangouts for Mr. Bad are places like Area 51 and the secret bunker beneath the Pentagon.

Finally, when his people turned down an interview because "Sinbad unfortunately just came down with the flu," we knew we had to look elsewhere. Perhaps all the cloning has weakened his immune system.

"Hmmm...that's deep," said Queensbridge MC Tragedy (a.k.a. Khadafi) when we revealed our theory. "Personally, I don't think he's funny. But people like him because he's non-threatening; he's safe." It's said that the devil will come disguised as a lamb.

"Why be shocked, man," continues the conspiracy-conscious lyricist. "I read some shit that said the Beatles were part of the Illuminati. When I read that, I was like, The Beatles? I love the Beatles. 'All You Need Is Love,' right?"

David Bry

bullets point-blank news



• IS THIS HOW WE PLAGIARIZE?

Songwriter Linda Stell claims that, in 1991, she and her son submitted a song titled "This Is How We Do It" to an A&R exec at BIV 10 Recordings. A year later, they heard Montell Jordan singing the same tune in a music video on the Box. And now Stell wants a piece of Jordan's platinum single. "We're suing Montell Jordan and all entities that have publishing interests in the song for copyright infringement," says Connie Mableson, Stell's attorney. Jordan's label, Def Jam, had no comment about the suit.



• SLAVERY REVISITED

The first major museum dedicated to the Underground Railroad—the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center—is set to open in the year 2002 in Cincinnati, Ohio. (Cincinnati was a major escape route for slaves in the 1800s.) NURFC, a multimedia complex of 125,000 square feet, will have guided tours, a resource center, and a genealogy section. "The Freedom Center will be a place where the lessons of the Railroad are revealed in dramatic ways to every visitor," said Edwin Rigaud, NURFC's executive director.

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Bad-Stuy fans show love for the Notorious B.I.G.

Brooklyn's Finest

Biggie's memorial service is a bittersweet affair

start On March 18, the hip hop community bid farewell to Christopher George Wallace, a.k.a. the Notorious B.I.G., with a somber funeral service and a festive memorial procession. While media vultures and screaming fans swarmed the front of Upper Manhattan's Frank E. Campbell funeral home, family and friends, including former New York mayor David Dinkins, Arista Records head Clive Davis, Queen Latifah, Luther Campbell, and Da Brat, filed indoors to pay their final respects.

The mood inside sharply contrasted with the chaos outside. Resigned and ever proud, Ms. Vollette Wallace read a Bible scripture for her only son. Then Sean "Puffy" Combs eulogized the 24-year-old rapper. "Big made me feel like I could conquer the world," said Combs. "Everyday I wake up and pray that it's all just a horrible dream. But it's not—Big's gone."

Soon after, Biggie's estranged wife, Faith Evans, lifted the house with a compelling gospel performance. And finally, while the instrumental of Big's own track "Miss U" played, mourners made their way to his open casket. Mary J. Blige held up a sobbing Lil' Kim; Big's friends Little Caesars and D-Rock struggled to contain their grief; and Big's business partner, Lance "Un" Rivera, carried Big and Faith's newborn son, the rapper's four-year-old daughter, and Faith's own daughter up to view the coffin.

After the emotionally charged service, thousands of onlookers cheered as more than a dozen cars, including the hearse carrying Biggie's body, made their way through the Brooklyn streets that the gifted MC once called home. A joint statement issued by Faith and Ms. Wallace said that it was family tradition that prompted them "to take Biggie on a last trip through Bed-Stuy and Fort Greene to give him the chance to say goodbye to his neighbors, and give [them] a chance to say goodbye to him."

But the postprocession celebration at Fulton Street and St. James Place (a block from where Big grew up) was marred when police clashed with a few overzealous fans, some of whom jumped atop parked cars. "The police were buggin'," said one witness. "I saw them rough people up and spray mace into the crowd."

Detective Mark Patterson, a spokesperson for the NYPD, would not confirm that the police used mace. "A few knuckleheads got outta control and had no respect for the funeral—or private property," said Patterson. "The police had to bring order, and we did." In the end, 10 people were arrested, including one reporter from the *New York Times*.

As Brooklynites paid their last respects, law enforcement officers were busy tracking down the man who killed Biggie March 9 in a drive-by shooting outside L.A.'s Petersen Automotive Museum.

On March 27, after following up on a tip that was called in to *America's Most Wanted*, the LAPD released a composite sketch of a nameless suspect—a black man in his early 20s with a thin mustache. L.A. cops have been investigating leads that suggest Biggie may have been shot by a Southside Crip gang member on account of some sort of financial dispute.

According to an affidavit filed by the Compton PD last year to obtain search warrants for a gang raid, Biggie and Bad Boy Records head Combs hired Southside Crip members as bodyguards while they were in L.A. In a recent MTV interview, Puffy denied any relationship with the Crips. "The misconception is that because we're young and black, we're not handling business just like anybody else," said Combs.

"The Final Tour," as it was written on the funeral program, was a bittersweet homecoming for the Notorious B.I.G. At the time of his death, Wallace was living in Teaneck, N.J. and didn't return much to his old "hood, friends say, because he feared being jacked by locals jealous of his success. But one week after the ceremony, a Fulton Street record store sold more than 2,000 copies of his double LP, *Life After Death*, on the day of its release. "Brooklyn really represented for Big," said Lil' Kim after the memorial. "I guess they did love him after all."

Minya Oh

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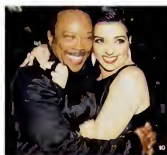
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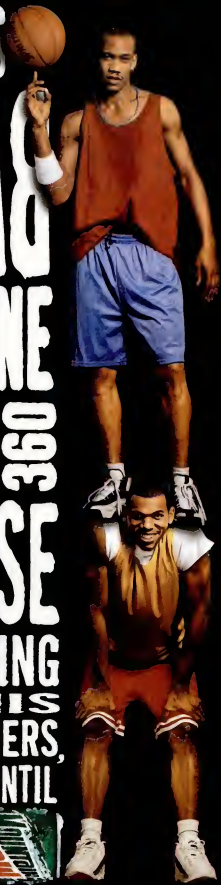
Starlight, Star Bright

start

1. When the Rhythm & Blues Foundation held its annual awards dinner at the Hilton Hotel and Towers in New York, new jacks as well as legends came to chow down. TLC's T-Boz and Isaac Hayes were among the fabulous people there. (2.) It was a treat for those in attendance to see Curtis Mayfield make an appearance. (3.) It looks as if KRS-One tripped up right in the middle of contradicting himself again during a performance at Philadelphia's Club Dance. (4.) One of basketball's youngest and brightest hardrocks, Allen Iverson (right) of the Philadelphia 76ers, threw a party at Malik Yoba's (left) Manhattan restaurant, Soul Café, to introduce his new Reebok sneaker. (5.) At Arista's pre-Grammy party, Aretha Franklin hung out—literally and figuratively—with Arista president Clive Davis. (6.) Maxwell was more than honored to meet Stevie Wonder backstage at the Grammys, held at Madison Square Garden. Hopefully, he asked Stevie for advice about how to maintain a successful career for years and years. (7.) Sheryl Crow and L.L. Cool J were ecstatic Grammy night because they both went home winners. (8.) She's still Miss Ross to you! Why shouldn't Diana think as highly of herself now as she did during the reign of the Supremes? (9.) Eric Clapton and Babyface scored big on Grammy night with "Change the World." Who would ever have guessed these two would make such a great team? (10.) If you saw the Grammys, then you too may be wondering what was up with Liza Minnelli, shown with the Man, her copresenter Quincy Jones. She sounded as if she was trying to do a Katherine Hepburn impression. (11.) The women of Zhané show Andre Harrell what they're capable of doing to him if their new album isn't handled correctly. Sure, he laughs now. (12.) Seal and Scott Weiland of the Stone Temple Pilots let loose at Polygram's post-Grammy party, held at Manhattan's Rainbow Room. (13.) Damn—former heavyweight champion Michael Spinks sure is smilin' big for someone who has only one front tooth—which happens to be purple! Poor Michael. You would think a man of his wealth could afford a dentist or something. He and the lovely Lynn Whitfield were at a party for BET's new *Largo*, Md. restaurant, Soundstage.



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In the MIX Too

Bubblin' Brown Sugar

1. The 11th Annual Soul Train Music Awards, held at L.A.'s Shrine Auditorium, was a celebration of black music at its best. Doesn't Da Brat look pretty, if a little too patriotic? (2.) Michael Bivins's pride and joy, 702, are joined by BLACKstreet and rapper Queen P backstage. (3.) Mary J. Blige is one of the few people there cool enough to actually pull off this outfit. (4.) It wasn't very nice of Bone Thugs-N-Harmony members Krazzie and Layzie to ask Snoop where he put his Soul Train award. Snoop should remind them that there was once a time when he too was in the spotlight—way back in the Dre days. (5.) The Braxtons are trying to live up to older sis Toni, but they should start by getting a new stylist. (6.) Aren't they cute? Monifah and her mentor Heavy D cuddle at the awards. 7. The Artist threw an exclusive party celebrating the double-platinum success of *Emanicipation* at Life in N.Y.C. Here, Spike Lee pretends to be interested while Joan Osborne presents her wild idea for a movie. She should just keep making records like the one the Artist rerecorded sounding 100 times better. (8.) The eclectic crowd of celebrities included one of the men from that scary-ass group Marilyn Manson (left) and Billy Coplan of Smashing Pumpkins. Just looking at those Marilyn Manson guys makes us wonder why Snoop Doggy Dogg wants to work with them—wasn't Suge monstrous enough? (9.) Superrocker Lenny Kravitz, joined by Russell Simmons, had to come out to celebrate with the Artist. So much of Lenny's career is based on lessons learned from the former Prince. (10.) Savion Glover (left), who lent his taps to *Emanicipation*, is joined by singer Tony Rich and Olympic gold medalist Dominique Dawes. 11. Ralph Tresvant (left), Bobby Brown, and Bobby's darling son, Bobby Jr., relax backstage at the Nashville stop on the NE Reunion Tour. One question. Why does Ralph look like a worn-out gangbanger? 12. At the ESPY Awards in N.Y.C., heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield demonstrates something he would never have been able to do to Muhammad Ali back in the day.

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Query Letter

March 9, 1997

Bönz Malone
357 Gun Hill Road
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Dear God,

start

I'm having a harder time than usual remaining peaceable. In the interest of helping me cope with my emotional contradictions, I'm asking you to provide me with the clarity and open-mindedness to write an in-depth piece about my inward struggle. This piece would chronicle the psychological competition that I engage myself in behind the story lines. Sometimes I have problems accepting authority; other times the problem is not being an authority. The only solution is to put myself under the sharpest knife, which is the pen.

As you well know, this past year has been fully loaded with learning experiences that were very difficult for me to overcome. A lot of harmful things I did because I was good at them, not because I liked them. I was consistent, and I thought I could never fail. But today, I'm dealing with dark issues. I don't feel like advocating peace. I wanna push somebody out the picture, finish a war that the other man started.

The story that I'm outlining would describe old habits that have become easy to explain but hard to break. The objective is not to glorify past wars I've miserably lost but to examine new challenges that threaten to prevent me from writing my true success story.

Remember that day when I said I'd rather be famous than rich? And that if given the choice between love and respect, I'd rather be loved? My story would reveal the brash and cocky persona I've adopted to obtain both of those jewels, all the while neglecting my inner self. I've lived like a wounded healer, from kind-hearted kid to crazy-minded criminal to good-willed gang leader. Please know that I'm not complaining. I just want to admit to you and to myself that I've selfishly misused your gifts for cheap thrills.

There's an ongoing control struggle inside me, where temptation fights against my spiritual principles. Through the constant introspection a writer requires, I've been able to find my true essence, and I am no longer a stranger to my inner self. Like everyone else's, my soul possesses both the beauty and the bru-

ality of nature. The good boss wants to be the most of everything—the most lovable, courageous, accepted, just, and respected. The bad boss wants to get the most out of everything and everyone through fear.

Most of the action in the epic saga I'm about to write takes place during a by-myself meeting of the minds. Upon a road less traveled gather some of Your greatest messengers: Abraham, Moses, Job, Solomon, Peter, Paul, and John.

moves for a dismissal and an acquittal. Paul seconds the motion and invites me to stand next to him on this decision. But before I can turn and step over the line, Nitty pulls out the heat, grabs me by the arm, and shouts, "Get lost, he's ours!" Then he whispers in my ear, "They made you, but we trained you."

That's when I cross the line. Not 'cause it's a good idea, but for reasons of ego: to show that I'm used to displaying negative power without think-

others to do the same. Now I want to tell my story; let my closest friends and even closer enemies know that I'm not as tough as I seem or, perhaps, would like to be; let them know that if I ever close my eyes and ears to reason, the chances of having an out-of-mind experience are somewhere between hell and yeah!

Just give me the go-ahead, and I'll write the truth: that problems arise when I'm always thinking tough. The ruffneck routine used to be a defense mechanism; now it's an addiction to pain. Each day I'm forced to go to war with my most incomparable foe: the person I was yesterday. The usual suspect does minor things to irritate me, like giving an overconfident facial in the morning's reflection. It's him I must grapple with when I turn off the Mac, close my unstoppable mouth, put away the motivational memoirs, and stare down destiny. I want to expose that person on paper, not with the intention of validating my irrationality or gaining sympathetic impressions from those who never liked or understood me. Why, then? So that the rest of my Tuph Street team can identify the real enemy.

My true adversary doesn't have pale skin tone because of a lack of melanin. He doesn't pass me over for promotions. He can hear everything I say yet cannot read my mind. He can influence me only if I'm harboring a desire to backslide. If he were to read this article, he would be totally clueless as to what it is I'm talking about, although You understand it. The person that I've become, I'm happy to say, is consciously helping people to help themselves. My question is this: How can I use the passionate energy You've blessed me with to involve others in this manuscript? And how can I prevent injustices toward myself and those I love to reinvent my old personality—the one that cares more about respect than love? There are a lot of human beings; I'd rather be a human doing. Help me do the write thing.

I patiently await your answer.



These are my spiritual counselors who provide me with G.O.D., Good Orderly Direction. The G.O.D. Squad stand ready to defend the faith on the right side of the road. To my left stand Capone, Nitty, Meyer, Buggy, Lucky, Giancana, and Sinatra. They're known as the M.O.B., Murder Our Brothers, and they take the position of offense. These two sides of my self stand on the line separated only by conscience.

The die is cast. Someone has murdered a B.I.G. member of my team. There is a need for justice. The M.O.B. react in classic fashion. "Break the guy's face!" says Lansky. Without a thought, I nod in agreement, but then Solomon intervenes with Your wisdom, saying only a fool pays back bad for bad. He

ing twice. For a crook with a conscience, the road less traveled can be an extremely Tuph Street.

I once wrote "America, Inc. loves a tough guy." But America isn't represented on my counsel. You are, through characters and principles that I love and respect but don't always uphold. The power (and responsibility) of decision is in my hands every minute of the day. The fingers on one hand represent Caring, Attention, Affection, Appreciation, and Love. On the other, there's Lust, Greed, Passion, Desire, and Sin. The question is: Which hand will grip the pen?

This is exactly why I'm proposing this article. You've brought me through the difficulties, helped me to appreciate discipline, learn from it, and encourage

Tuph Street
.....
By
Bönz Malone

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Funking Intellect

My mother likes to say there are 50 Black people in the world who know how to read and write, and, factoring in one degree of separation, they all know one another. Her father, Granddaddy Henry, however, espoused the belief that no matter where you go in the world and no matter what you see, somewhere up in there you will find a Negro. These opposing views of Black folks beg the question: Are we Du Bois's vaunted Talented Tenth, or are we a Talented 30 Million?

Believe that hip hop, like blues, jazz, and funk before it, definitively answered the question of whether Black genius was minutely distributed or abundantly evident in the culture we call Black. (For the record: I uppercase "Black" because, since nobody knows anybody as black as tar, we can't be using the term to describe color, and therefore must be using it to describe an ethnic group, nationality, or political affiliation, as in Yoruba, Italian, or Communist—if not all of the above.)

Hip hop demands we opt for abundance rather than scarcity when it comes to Black creative prowess. How else to explain the masses of mesmerizing literary stylists who have sprung from Black culture since the '80s, who emerged not from the academy but from the postliterate ranks of the African-American working class? Hip hop demands also that we address the question of whose opinion matters most: the Africans you can see or the niggas you don't want to?

Hip hop is our race and class differences shoved into a blender. Hip hop is a house nigger/field nigger opposition, a revolutionary brother versus boot-licking Uncle Tom debate, a ghetto nigger/bourgeois nigger conflict, a gangsta rapper/progressive freestyle contest. Hip hop demands we listen to the lyric invention and profound vernacular proffered by Rakim, Chuck D, KRS-One, De La Soul, Freestyle Fellowship, and Chef Raekwon, and then ask where do they get their funkling intellect from?

Who knew that brewing in the Bronx natives refer to as the Boogie Down and the Island of Staten that Wu-Tang Clan renamed Shao Lin were wordsmiths of a revolutionary poetic prowess? More terribly, if there hadn't been a phenomenon called hip hop, who would ever have known? I can't say how my life would have been different if I hadn't seen Crazy Legs whirl on his head

like it was a gyroscope or if the Treacherous Three hadn't recorded "The New Rap Language" or if Fab 5 Freddy had not thrown up a graffiti painting of Campbells' soup cans on the side of a New York subway train. What I do know is that my sense of the world and its marvelous contents would be immensely diminished.

Where do we get our funkling intellect from? What school of child rearing and communal experience results in a Rakim? Never mind his funk, where does

love about ourselves today. And if hip hop is about nothing else, it's about our love for life, laughter, sensuality, and the succinct wisdom of our mother wit.

For all that, hip hop is also big business, and it will continue to beg the question, again and again, of whether it's the product of tribal acculturation or capitalist exploitation. I believe it to be tragically and sublimely both. What hip hop represents as supremely as anything is our schizophrenic nature as Americanized Africans.



PASS THE HAND GRENADE
Eric B. & Rakim are still the bomb.

his cultural confidence and knowledge of self come from? "I got soul / That's why I came / to teach those who can't say my name / First of all I'm a soloist / a self-controller / Rakim gets stronger as I get older / Constant elevation causes expansion / I write my rhymes while I cool in my mansion." What is hip hop? A Black linguistic revolution of terms and terminology, a site for the popular development of Black intellects.

The right to Black expression could never be the province of only those Negroes who come college and corporate approved. The folk who survived the slave trade did not persevere because of superhuman individual effort but because of their collective cultural will to survive, endure, and overcome. The culture they preserved with their indefatigable spirits accounts for all that we

In all the recent brouhaha over Ebony's—better known as Black English—hip hop hardly seems to come up. This is strange, considering that the hip hop industry, built on Black English, is now a billion-dollar business whose direct sales and influence profitably impact not just the recording industry but also fashion, film, electronics, print, radio, and television advertising, motor vehicles, and liquor (especially malt liquor). So the question becomes, Why is Black English perfectly acceptable when it's Busta Rhymes and LL Cool J being paid big bank to market *Space Jam*, but seen as the road to ruin in the classroom?

Once upon a time, there was no hip hop industry. Once upon a time, we acquired our hip hop product from mom-and-pop stores, not multinational corporations. The question is not, *When*

did things change? or *Why* did things change? but *How* has the change itself fulfilled the destiny of hip hop from jump street? In concept, hip hop was never antiracist, pro-Black, or intentionally avant-garde. Up until Public Enemy, hip hop's intent was never to shock the world but to sell the market on its novelty and profitability.

Hip hop is style, gesture, and nuance. Hip hop is stunts, blunts, and guns. Hip hop is sneakers, jeeps, and Sprite. Hip hop is Black Authenticity at bargain-basement prices. Hip hop is a minstrel show masquerading as a Marcus Garvey rally. Hip hop is Malcolm X with a *Wall Street Journal* tucked under his arm.

Once upon a time, some of us naively thought hip hop was the revolution come again. Once upon a time, we hoped hip hop would be that strategic synthesis of Black politics, art, economics, and spirituality that Harold Cruse called for in his epochal tome *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*.

When did hip hop become the revolution that failed? When hip hop didn't stop to read Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. That novel prophetically unveiled the down cycle that results whenever emancipation is confused with a weekly paycheck, whenever inflammatory rhetoric is mistaken for contemplated action, whenever the loudest voice in our midst is considered the most astute, whenever charisma is asked to fill the vacuum created by an absence of cognitive reasoning and character.

Here, on the eve of my 40th birthday, I find myself mediating debates about hip hop between folk young and old. The most fractious infighting seems to go on between those who came of age during the Black Power movement and those born from 1970 onwards. My mother, a Snoop fan at 65 who hails from the wild and loose Swing era of the 1940s, has less of a problem with rap's sexual frankness than many Black middle-class folks 20 years her junior. Same as it ever was. The controversies surrounding hip hop in the Black community have revived an ongoing debate over who best tells Black stories: our blues people or our bourgeoisie?

Black-Owned
.....
By
Greg Tate

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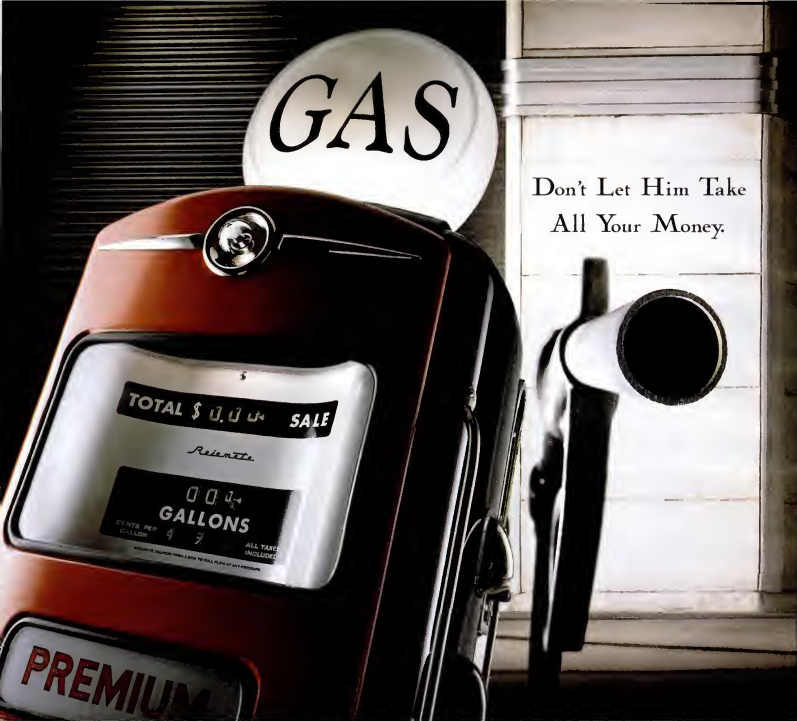
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Killing Time

In Ol' Mississippi, a young black man faces a "legal lynching." By *Cheo Taylor Tyehimba*

In the climactic courtroom scene of the movie version of John Grisham's *A Time to Kill*, a Mississippi attorney implores an all-white jury to empathize—not so much with the black defendant facing the death penalty, but with each other. He asks them to consider how they'd respond if the little girl who was raped and nearly killed was not his, but their own. Onscreen it worked like a charm. But the same impediment to justice that was overcome in the hit movie isn't so easily vanquished in the real world—the statistically proven racism of America's judicial system.

Racial bias in the application of the death penalty is as American as paydays and picnics. One need only check the U.S. Bureau of Justice for some offending statistics: Between 1930 and 1990, 4,016 persons were executed in the United States; 2,129 of them—53 percent—were African-Americans, who constitute only 12 percent of the population.

In Madison County, Miss., in the same town where the courtroom scenes for *A Time to Kill* were shot, a real-life capital-murder case with racial overtones is set to go to trial. This time, the life of a young black male hangs in the balance. It all began on January 25, 1996, when Azikiwe "Azi" Kambule, a 17-year-old recently transplanted from South Africa to Jackson, Miss., became entangled in the brutal carjacking and murder of 31-year-old Pamela McGill, a successful black social worker. Azi was riding in a car driven by Santonio Berry, a 21-year-old with a criminal record. Berry spotted McGill driving a 1993 red Dodge Stealth, told Azi that he wanted her car, followed her until she parked, and then commandeered the car at gun point. After telling Azi to get in the back of McGill's car, which he did, Berry drove the three of them into neighboring Madison County.

Leaving Azi in the car, Berry got out and took McGill deep into the woods, where he made her kneel before shooting her in the back of the head. Azi says he could not see or hear what was happening, and couldn't leave because he didn't know how to drive the car. But he knew his life had changed forever when Berry returned to the car and said he'd shot McGill.

Azi, Berry, and Rudy Rhodes and his girlfriend (who allegedly harbored Berry and Azi after the murder) were arrested about a week later, after authorities got a lead that someone was trying to sell the car. From the beginning, Azi cooperated fully with police, searching with them in an unsuccessful attempt to find McGill's body. Two months later, Berry—who was initially

uncooperative—led investigators to the crime scene. Both Berry and Azi were charged with capital murder, punishable by lethal injection. In Mississippi, as in several other states, accessories to a murder can be charged with the crime itself, as Azi has been.

One of Hinds County Prosecutor Ed Peters' first moves was to transfer Azi's trial from predominantly black Hinds to Madison County, which has a larger white population. The family from the beginning has expressed a desire that the people charged get the death penalty. Peters told the Jackson *Clarion Ledger*. "The jurors in Hinds County have a reputation for refusing to vote for the death penalty." Last March, Madison County DA James Kitchens struck a deal with Berry,



Azi Kambule, a 17-year-old South African, faces the death penalty.

getting him to cop a guilty plea in return for his cooperation in the prosecution of Azi. At press time, Berry faced only a life sentence, but Kitchens was still pressing for the death penalty against Azi. His zeal in this case may be related to his reported desire to seek a judgeship in Mississippi. According to Richard Dieter at the Death Penalty Information Center, many prosecutors use death-penalty cases as "campaign showcases" in order to appear "tough on crime." (Kitchens didn't return several calls from VIBE regarding this story.)

So why is Azi, a former honor student without a criminal record, facing the death penalty for a murder he didn't commit? "This is an effort to gain a broad acceptance of the death penalty in the black community," says Chokwe Lumumba, Azi's defense attorney,

"thereby weakening our resolve to resist the discriminatory application of the death penalty and making us more receptive in the future to its normal use—where white people are murdered and you have predominantly white juries sentencing people to death."

If Azi does receive the death penalty, his conviction will continue a shameful legacy of sentencing minors to death. Since 1990, only five countries have executed persons under age 18 for crimes they committed: Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the United States. The U.S. leads the pack: 143 minors have been sentenced to death since 1973 and 66 percent of them were black or brown. These facts are in direct opposition to the UN-chartered Covenant on the Rights of the Child, a document the U.S. has signed.

But let's flip the script for a moment. How would you react if someone viciously murdered your mother, daughter, or son? Let that reality sink in, cry the death-penalty supporters. Maybe they have a point. We've seen how senseless slayings of innocents (like Ennis Cosby, Nicole Brown Simpson, and Ron Goldman) can produce incredible anger and bitterness, sometimes even a resolve to "settle the score." Pamela McGill's murder has stoked a blaze of volatile emotions in Mississippi, as well as highlighted the divided loyalties in a case of black-on-black crime.

"Blacks tend to give the death penalty less than whites do," says Lumumba, "but this case is a bit peculiar, in that the woman who was killed was black." McGill was middle class and college educated, an active member of the local black community. Robert Johnson, the Jackson police chief, who's also black, says many local residents join him in supporting the death-penalty charge. "I'm for it," Johnson says. "It was a cold-blooded, vicious killing, and in my mind... the death penalty is appropriate." Busiwse Chabeli, Azi's mother, understandably disagrees with Johnson, but she admits: "It's a very, very difficult situation. They have lost a child. I, on the other hand, am still able to see my child even though he's incarcerated."

The case of Azi Kambule is more than just another crime spectacle. It's a perfect opportunity for African-Americans—and anyone who cares about equal justice—to demand a reform of death-penalty cases. "Here we have a situation where [the DAs] can win points with the conservative whites and say that they're doing it on behalf of a victimized black community," says Ben Jealous, a spokesman for the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. "They can really do the devil's work and come off looking like saints." As long as the death penalty remains a blunt instrument of the criminal-justice system wielded against African-Americans, black folks facing execution will be pipped from one Grisham-like courtroom to the next.

POWER

Stay of Execution

The American Bar Association calls for a halt to the death penalty. By Farai Chideya

Justice in America is too often based on color—brown skin putting you on a short road to the chair; green in the wallet exempting rich defendants from capital punishment, or sometimes any punishment at all.

No less an authority than the U.S. Supreme Court admitted that the death penalty is racist, although it declined to do anything about it. In the 1987 McCleskey vs. Kemp decision, the Court accepted evidence that a convicted black murderer is four times as likely to receive the death penalty if the victim is white. Yet the justices decided that this clear evidence of racial bias still couldn't be used by incarcerated black men and women seeking retrials.

Although the Supreme Court declined to press for equal justice, the nation's largest and most influential law association, the American Bar Association (ABA), has taken on that massive task. This February, the ABA's main body demanded a freeze on all executions until criminal-justice systems across the country can ensure that cases are tried fairly, without regard to factors such as race and income. The ABA already had a track record of monitoring the death penalty; previously, it had denied executing mentally retarded defendants and people who committed crimes while they were minors.

Robert Grey is a 46-year-old African-American member of the ABA with a daunting array of commitments. He practices business law in his hometown of Richmond, Va., chairs the local chamber of commerce, and is the former president of the oldest black political organization in town, the Crusade for Voters. Grey spoke to us about the implications of the ABA's stand against unfair executions.

What exactly does the ABA's resolution on the death penalty demand?

It calls for those jurisdictions that have the death penalty to examine what many have identified as problems with the procedures surrounding those who have been charged with capital crimes. If a state finds that it is not in compliance with protections for those charged with capital crimes, the resolution asks that they not impose death-penalty sentences until they do comply.

Does it call for an end to the death penalty?

No. The ABA is a very conservative organization. It knew what it was doing when it did this. It wasn't

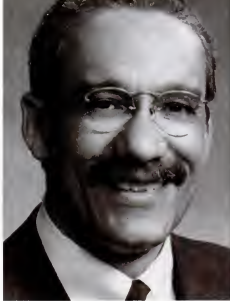
saying don't have a death penalty. The resolution specifically said if we are going to have a death penalty, let's make sure it's applied fairly.

Was racial bias the main reason for the resolution?

That clearly was an important part of it. Black defendants are likely to be executed at a higher rate than white defendants. And black defendants found guilty of capital crimes against black victims are more likely to get capital punishment than whites who are convicted of capital crimes against blacks.

So what was the Supreme Court's reasoning in ruling, essentially, that the racial discrimination in the application

Attorney Robert Grey backs the ABA's moratorium on the death penalty.



of the death penalty didn't matter? That it was just about luck?

They ruled that there's no existing legal standard requiring the death penalty to be applied without racism. There was an attempt to create this standard during the last session of Congress with the Racial Justice Act. It was passed by one house of Congress and rejected by the other. If the legislators refuse to create such a standard, and the Court says there is no legal standard, defendants are caught in a catch-22.

Have you ever been the lawyer in a case where the defendant was being tried for execution?

Yes.

Did that change how you viewed the urgency of the case?

I don't think there is any question that there is a great deal more pressure on lawyers, victims, courts, prosecutors to do whatever's necessary to see that the

defendant gets a fair trial. These are the most difficult cases our society has to deal with. There's the anguish—the agony that everyone has in trying to fairly represent their clients.

What other legal issues affect the application of the death penalty today?

Congress passed an antiterrorist act that has a death-penalty provision, and calls for an expedited post-conviction process. If someone is innocent and has not received good representation, we may be rushing people to the chair that don't deserve to go.

Those who support the death penalty often complain that it takes too long to execute guilty people. How do you feel about that?

It's a juggernaut—we're trying to protect the indigent and those who have been mistreated by creating a delay. That same delay may keep those who have been properly sentenced from being executed.

How do race and money intersect in these cases?

When is the last time you saw a millionaire executed for murder? It just doesn't happen. When someone of great wealth is involved, they're usually able to mount a fairly successful campaign to fight the conviction—and if convicted, the penalty. Indigent defendants are more likely to be minority than not, and they are less likely to have adequate representation than not—consequently, [they are] more likely to receive the death penalty. It's like a domino effect.

How effective do you think the ABA's resolution will be in ending death penalty injustices?

We should judge by what happens. Somebody's gotta start with something. You hope that some legislators will decide to pick it up—or someone in the DA's office.

Is the rhetoric of urban and youth crime being used to justify the death penalty?

There's a higher degree of hopelessness among young people in racial ghettos. We are clearly seeing a higher use of guns. The problem is not going away just because we don't like it. Believe it or not, I don't think people want to give up on this generation. People think this generation has the potential to meet the needs of a changing society. It is all our responsibility—the business community, churches, educators, political leaders—to get in a collaborative mind-set in solving these issues.

What can the VIBE reader do?

We should make our communities aware of the need to speak out on these matters. Ask and continue to ask questions [like], Is this fair? Did the person have good representation? If you know someone who's a defendant in a capital case, make it clear that the defendant can speak up in court—he can say things like, "I don't feel like I'm going to make it; I'm not getting good representation; no one is talking to the witness I suggest."

Ask questions about your local criminal justice system. "How many blacks do we execute in this state as compared to whites?" "What are the differences in terms of who gets the death penalty?" "Explain to us why that's so." Write letters to the editor and ask that these issues be talked about on talk shows. It's a question of consciousness-raising. ■

POWER



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"THOSE ARE WICKED! THEY LOOK PERFECT with your trousers!" exclaims Andrew Barlow, one half of the British duo Lamb, as I model a pair of Adidas "walkers." We're shopping in Manchester's newly rebuilt Arndale Center (half of the structure was destroyed by an IRA bomb in 1996) on an unusually warm day. The 22-year-old "mad for clothes" producer/programmer is the personification of his group's music—simultaneously attentive, distracted, dreamy, and philosophical. While we shop, Lamb's vocalist, Louise Rhodes, 10 years Andy's senior and noticeably more mellow, is at home nursing a chest infection brought on by weeks of touring.

Lamb have been to almost every country

in Europe promoting their self-titled debut. It's a hypnotic blend of jazz, drum 'n' bass, classical, and electronica woven in with Louise's haunting vocals (her voice has been compared to Sinéad O'Connor's and Björk's). However, Lou, as she is affectionately known, defines Lamb's sound as "future jazz," not drum 'n' bass. "Drum 'n' bass, quite simply, is music for the dance floor. Jazz has always been a style that draws together a whole range of music influences. And," she adds slyly, "the term is sufficiently vague." As for the complexity of the production, Andy offers this: "Music that's easy to listen to has a short shelf life. Our music is all about the subtleties and the atmospheres underneath."

The unlikely pair hooked up through a weird stroke of fate. Louise had almost given up her dream of singing when a friend told her about a young sound engineer he was working with. The timing couldn't have been better. "I got sacked from my job the day I met Lou," Andy says. "They said I was too weird." The two clicked like brother and sister, with Lou writing lyrics and singing, and Andy "playing technology" and persuasion. Louise suggested the name Lamb because it wouldn't connote a specific musical style.

And like any other brother and sister, Andy and Louise fight. "So many times one of us has stomped out of the room," explains Lou, "but the music always brings us back. It's the umbilical cord that connects us." *Andréa M. Duncan*

LAMB

Just too complex

Louise Rhodes, Andrew Barlow

NEXT

PEOPLE ON THE VERGE

TWENTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD JEAN-JACQUES Cadet is goin' places, but for the past half hour he's been stuck on Baiter Avenue. An avid video Monopoly high roller, the SUNY Albany Junior, better known as J-Live, eventually opts to abandon the game with guest friend and producer George Brown (whose Brooklyn girl could be as real as Real Kool Productions), leaving the Cadet stranded on the glittering Baiter Avenue.

"I want an album that's gonna be classic in the eyes of true hip hop listeners," the Uptown N.Y.C. kid says of his forthcoming debut LP, *Timeless*. The early word on J-Live didn't just start because his Raw Shock independent debut single, "Longevity" b/w "Braggin' Writes," sold 12,000 records, but because he both rhymed and manipulated the turntables on "Braggin' Writes"—a highly impressive feat he duplicates during performances. The single's success led to last year's release of "Can I Get It" b/w "Hush the Crowd," which sold even better, as well as the tight DJ Spina remix of "Braggin' Writes."

Undergraduate J is well schooled, also in record buying, especially on music over one inch. "I have [a] collection of vinyls, I collect soul, funk, hip hop, jazz, and pop," he remembers. "Some say I don't fit the deejay's molders, say J-Live is quite the appearance, we come under suspicion. The molds, 'We had a meeting with one of the labels, and they said, 'What does he look like?' We were like, 'We're real! We're good records.' And the label was like, 'Well, I don't sign two kinds of people, a white woman want to fuck and other people want to like, and women who other women want a boyfriend and guys wantin' a fucker.'"

In defense of his man, J-Live says he's just: "Eve Costello, wasn't that some sensitive person, but he wrote more of the songs. Upon hearing this, J shakes his head and says, 'I really don't like Eve Costello.'"

And that's J-Live, who—when he ain't playin' ball or chess—stays at home or in the library studying. "I'm just your average Joe when it comes down to it. I just like to rhyme." Gabriel Ayala

J-LIVE
In the long run

NEXT

PHOTOGRAPH BY TERRENCE MIELE



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NUYORICAN SOUL
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NEXT

IT'S ANOTHER LATE NIGHT AT STRICTLY RHYTHM STUDIOS. FOR the past seven years, "Little" Louie Vega and Kenny "Dope" Gonzalez have remixed and produced more than 500 tracks under the name

Masters at Work, from *The Mambo Kings* soundtrack to Michael Jackson. To call them "busy" would probably be insulting. Tonight they're working through dinner, again, and talking about their new project, *Nuyorican Soul*, a homage to the music that inspired their first steps toward the turntable.

"We dug into a lot of different flavors," says Vega. "We were able to flow all these styles of music into each other, changing keys right from disco to Latin jazz." The 1995 single "The Nervous Track" was Vega and Gonzalez's first effort as the masterminds of *Nuyorican Soul*: Imagine being on a deejayed tour of N.Y.C., sliding through multihued neighborhoods with jazz, hip hop, house, soul, funk, and R&B waiting out of windows.

After chasing down musicians at various venues and studios, the producers expanded *Nuyorican Soul* to

include guest appearances by legends such as George Benson, Roy Ayers, and Tito Puente, plus DJ Jazzy Jeff and "Somebody Else's Guy" chanteuse Jocelyn Brown. Vince Montana Jr. and the SalSoul Orchestra revisit their 1977 hit "Runaway." The new version, featuring Vega's former sweetheart India Arie, shot to No. 1 on the dance charts.

Vega, 31, grew up on disco and salsa in the Bronx (the late salsa musician Hector LaVoe was his uncle), and became famous deejaying in New York clubs. In 1991 he started collaborating with Brooklyn native Gonzalez, 26, who had been mixing beats since age 15. Together, they formed Masters at Work and created hits such as

"Love and Happiness" and "The Bomb."

"You know when you're getting brought up and you're being told what you are?" asks Gonzalez. "I'll never forget the time I said, 'I'm Puerto Rican, and my Uncle Reed said, 'No you're not, you're Nuyorican,' because my parents came from Puerto Rico; but I was born in New York." Which is exactly the point—and purpose—of their all-star extravaganza. "It's about us growing up; it's our lives," Vega says.

"Nuyorican Soul is what we're about."

Hannah Tinti



Clockwise from top center: Dave Valentin, Roy Ayers, India, Jocelyn Brown, "Little" Louie Vega (right) and Kenny "Dope" Gonzalez (left). Bottom: Hilton Ruiz, Vince Montana, George Benson. Center: Tito Puente

MJ on:
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THERE'S NOTHING LIKE A SEXY MF TO PUT a sister with a 'tude and an aching back in a better mood. Never mind two sexy MFs, which is what I encounter when I step into the Times Square hotel room where Christian (pronounced crist-yawn)—Oakland brothers Allen Anthony and Kenny Ski—sit honey dipped, clean shaven, and fresh geared. Mind you, I'm still not sure how to say their name. Whenever I hear it on the radio, I think to myself, *who in the hell is Chris Jones?*

"Yeah, we get that a lot. People are, like, 'You mean Cristal?'" jokes Kenny Ski. "The name of the group was going to be 'Christian' because our music is spiritually uplifting, but we didn't want to turn anyone off, so we changed the 'tian' to

'tion.' In our language, it means poetry in motion."

So it's not a French word?

"Well, no," demures Ski. "But it sounds French, and we like that."

Okay, coming from anyone else (save the artist formerly known as Prince), such an answer would make no sense. But 24-year-old Anthony and 25-year-old Ski—who write, produce, and arrange their own music—have a way of making the vague crystal clear and the seemingly unrelated inseparable. Christian are the first R&B act on Jay-Z's indie-rap label, Roc-a-Fella Records, and the irresistible single "Full of Smoke," from their poetic debut album, *Ghetto Cyrano*, is a Curtis Mayfield-esque vignette about the downward spiral of a street hustler.

But with the current onslaught of "new soul" singers, Christian wonder if there's room for them. Not to worry: I've yet to hear any other Generation Next pop or soul group mention Donny Hathaway, Elton John, Gino Vannelli, and Wham! as their music influences. Not all in the same breath anyway.

"Since we were young, I wanted us to be the biggest duo since Wham!," Anthony says with a wholehearted grin. "Smoke" does indeed resonate with echoes of George Michael

channeled through Anthony's graceful falsetto and Ski's unrelenting background harmonies. "I want everyone to like our music. Back in the day, everyone was into Wham!," he continues. "And everyone laughs, cries, and gets their heart broken—even if you're a hustler."

Tracy E. Hopkins

NEXT

CHRISTION

Music from the edge of heaven

Alli Truch

I make the part of the record you don't hear.
I design album covers for Elektra.

Mostly, my nephew, and the cutest guy I know under 3 feet. (He's probably the only thing in my life that doesn't accept Visa.)

When I need to buy four sequined bras for a photo-shoot in an hour, I go here.



I like this place because it's open later than I work.

A fraction ticket stubs. Go figure, I like music.

Visa Purchases:

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A reward for all my hard work.)

SHOES - \$214.50 (Black, funky, with a big heel.)

CD's, CD's, CD's - I gotta know what the competition is up to, right?

LUNCH - \$55.78 (Finalized details for album cover with photographer.)

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toni's secret

Miss Braxton lets it all hang out. *By Michael A. Gonzales*

Photographs by Daniela Federici.

Styling by Derick Procope





You're killing me," says Toni Braxton breathily when I tell her I want to talk about sex. A heartbeat later, though, the shyness falls away and she plunges in. "I was twenty years old when I lost my virginity," Toni purrs into the telephone. It's easy for me to imagine her lying on soft sheets in her designer dollhouse bedroom, clad in lingerie, gently stroking the giant teddy bear next to her queen-size bed. With the lights dimmed and scented candles burning on the dresser, she giggles softly, seductively, her doe eyes reflecting the full moon's glow outside her window. "I can't tell you how," she teases, her voice sweet as cotton-candy clouds. "My father might be reading this."

Who would have guessed that a self-described junior high geek whose father was a preacher man would blossom into *this*? Part saint, part sinner, 29-year-old Toni Braxton is the kind of woman who makes men moan in their sleep before waking to ask her hand in marriage. Biggie's "Dreams" spoke for many in 1994 when he bluntly boasted of "guaranteed satisfaction" with Toni Braxton. But back then it seemed outrageous to think of her that way. From the small-town girl in the church choir to the provocative chanteuse who sings of "feeling you inside me," Toni has gone through an image metamorphosis worthy of Kafka.

Her first album, 1993's *Toni Braxton*, was perhaps the quietest eight-million-selling debut in history. Dressed in conservative clothes and singing wounded songs like "Seven Whole Days," Toni made you want to console her and send her to bed with a hot cup of tea. But with last year's *Secrets*—which has moved four million copies so far—she became more sexy supergirl than girl next-door. Now she walks the high wire between the sacred and the profane in Manolo Blahnik pumps. She's got no problem switching from the epitome of class to a lustful boy-toy in the blink of an *Il Makiage* false eyelash. Or, as Sinbad put it at this year's NAACP Image Awards, "Toni Braxton is the definition of *head*."

In my mind I can see her lush MAC-painted ruby lips fixed in a schoolgirl pout. Long piano-playing fingers flutter like pretty brown birds onto her flat cinnamon belly. "I just wish guys didn't think of sex as a sleeping pill," she says. "Men shouldn't go into a coma after we're finished."

I laugh. Maybe the guy is already satisfied.

"Well, if you ask me, it's kind of selfish. A creative lover is one who is sensitive and caring," she

murmurs. "It's a wonderful feeling when your lover caresses your hair; but perhaps it's more creative just to grab it." Her voice is honey dripping down a stack of waffles. "The art of seduction is coming to the door wearing pretty underwear," she says, and my weak heart throbs. "I'm holding crystal flutes of Cristal with a ripe strawberry in each glass. My nails are done, my hair is done, and I'm just in sexual-kitten mode. Sometimes a little fantasy is important."

The fantasy really kicked in during Toni's stunning performance at the Billboard Music Awards last December when she opened the show with an up-tempo rendition of "Un-Break My Heart." Toni was radiant in her glitzy outfit, bopping like a '90s Ziegfeld girl. Moments later, when she returned to the stage, she'd transformed herself into a voluptuous hottie, belting her theme of sexual enlightenment, "You're Makin' Me High." She sang of ecstatic orgasms and five fingers of self-pleasure, thrilling masses of drooling men as she strutted in a white catsuit. Toni Braxton's personal sexual revolution was being televised.

From her husky bedroom voice floating on radio airwaves to her visually intoxicating television appearances, Toni Braxton has cast a spell over America. Unlike the ghetto divas littering the black-pop landscape who shroud their marginal talents with a big butt and a smile, Toni has a glow of sophistication behind her glam-slam armor. There are those who say her new bombshell image is prefab pop packaging, but Toni's seen herself larger-than-life for a long time, and she's doing whatever it takes to make her dream real.

"When I was a kid," she recalls, "I would watch old musicals like *My Fair Lady* and study the fashions. I used to pretend I was a glamorous artist being played by Lauren Bacall." She's still attracted to the retro allure of pop history. Now that she's considered a true diva, Toni's more than happy to dress the part in custom Marc Bouwer designs. "One album can't explain all your moods," she says. "So with *Secrets* I decided it was time to experiment with fashion." The experiment has apparently been successful. Last year she was voted most stylish artist at the VH1 Fashion Awards, and this April, although a doll-like size two, she prowled the runway for Bouwer's spring collection.

"There's like a collaboration," says Davett Singletary, LaFace Records's VP of artist development and marketing, who's responsible for Toni's styling and image. "A beautiful marriage. She tells him her concepts, and he interprets her vision." That vision—chic but skimpy gowns that leave little to the imagination—has raised eyebrows and sometimes upstaged even her singing. After a triumphant performance at this year's American Music Awards, Toni walked offstage backward. "It was a see-through dress," explains Singletary. "She felt like her booty was her business."

"I wear provocative clothes because they make me feel sexy," says Toni without apology. "If an artist like Madonna was wearing her booty hanging out, she's considered a genius. But if a black person does it, we're considered skank whores or sluts." On a roll, Toni adds: "Black girls have to learn not to be afraid of fashion. As far as wearing revealing clothes, I gotta wear them now before my booty gets flat. If I dress like that when I get

old, people are going to talk about me."

Toni's sexual mystique haunts my mind as I stand at the door of her condo in Century City, Calif. The label publicist has informed me that I'm the first journalist allowed into Miss Braxton's crib. I could only wonder if she'd be like the shy woman I met five years ago in Atlanta when she was recording "Breathe Again": Dressed in jeans and a simple T-shirt, and profiling the classic short-wrap haircut that would become the rage in black beauty parlors across America, she still seemed a shy siren. If I'm lucky, this time she might be wearing a flimsy dress with an ultrathin plunging neckline. In my mind, I was already back in New York impressing strangers in bars with graphic descriptions of Toni Braxton's black-Barbie-doll physique.

She opens the door, and my scandalous daydream crumbles like sandcastles in the tide. Clad in tight blue

"The art of seduction is coming to the door wearing pretty underwear. I'm holding crystal flutes of Cristal with a ripe strawberry in each glass. My nails are done, my hair is done, and I'm just in sexual-kitten mode."

jeans, a light green baseball cap, and a gray DKNY sweatshirt, Toni flashes her neon smile. The rush of artificial coolness from the air-conditioner caresses my face before she heats my cheek with her lips. "Would you like to talk inside or outside?" she asks.

Walking across the plush beige carpet in her bare feet, cute toes painted the same dark red as her fingernails, Toni leads me to the sunlit sanctuary of the terrace, and I'm once again surprised by how tiny she is in person. "Sometimes I disappoint my fans, because they think I'm taller," she says with a sigh. "I was in an airport recently and this guy was, like, 'Dang, she all little. Look like my sister.' By the tone of his voice he seemed to be angry, bewildered, and betrayed."

"Should I take off my shirt now?" she asks when I tell her I'm looking forward to a provocative interview. She starts a joke striptease. *Pleasure don't, I stutter*, feeling the blood rush to my face. "All right," she relents. "Can I get you anything to drink?" I make myself comfortable in her neat, oversize apartment. She goes to the kitchen to get me a glass of orange juice.

Pushing her long weave out of her eyes, Toni sips from a glass of water with a floating lemon slice and

tells the story of her childhood in Severn, Md. "I was a country square," she says, "—you know, the girl you saw on the monkey bars with the pleated skirts and patent leather Buster Brown shoes hanging upside down. I was different."

Raised in a strict apostolic household by her preacher father and choir director mother, Toni wasn't allowed to listen to secular music at home. "But when my parents left me at the neighbor's house, I would get a chance to listen to Rick James and Luther Vandross," she says, all excited. "Because it was taboo, I had to have it."

"We had a family group called the Braxtons that included my older brother and my three younger sisters," she recalls, and I try to imagine her standing in the houses of the holy, following gospel standards. "We sang at every Youth Day in the Baltimore and D.C. areas."

Although she was a shining star in the eyes of the Lord and her parents, in the minds of her classmates Toni was just another nerdy kid who wanted to be down. "My problem was I was a square trying to hang with the in crowd instead of sitting in the corner with the other squares. Let me show you some pictures from back then."

With a jiggle in her walk, Toni guides me to a table that's overflowing with framed photographs from various stages of her life. "In high school, I was trying to be the black Madonna," she says with a laugh, indicating a shot in her "Like a Virgin" pose: black tank top under a fishnet shirt, hair cut short and dyed strawberry blonde. "At that time, I was really into Madonna and Janet Jackson," she says, "—especially Janet, because when she released her *Control* album, she made it easy for P.K.'s [preachers' kids] who were supposed to be sweet and docile to get comfortable with feeling sexy."

Toni didn't sing outside the family clan until she was 19, when she joined a local band as their keyboard player. "I've forgotten the name of the group," she says, "but I do remember the leader had to ask my parents' permission for me to practice with them. The day we played our first gig, my father told me to be home at one-thirty, but we had to play three sets. I got home at three-thirty, and that was the end of my band days."

A stroke of fortune brought her to Arista Records—Clive Davis's House of Divas—home of Whitney, Aretha, and Dionne. Songwriter Bill Pettaway held the petite soulless singer while she filled her tank at an Annapolis gas station. Pettaway introduced her to the right people at Arista and helped the Braxtons get a single deal.

"There was a five-year difference between me and my next sister," says Toni. "So there was the marketing problem of whether to dress us in booty dresses or OshKosh." The Braxtons' single, "The Good Life," was released in 1990. "I knew it would flop," she says. "I was just excited to be in the big leagues, even if it meant sitting on the bench. Those were the days I would sing at the opening of an envelope."

Arista let the Braxton girls audition for the newly formed LaFace Records. L.A. Reid and Kenny "Babyface" Edmonds came to see them perform at a club in Atlanta. "Toni definitely stood out from her sisters," L.A. recalls. "We tried to watch the entire stage, but our eyes kept returning to Toni. Babyface was in awe of her tone, and I was in awe of her presence." Signed in November of that year, Toni moved to Atlanta the following month to begin work on tracks.

SECRETS AND LIES

"One year people are accusing
me of being a lesbian; the next year, I'm
a whore who dated the entire NBA."



BREATHE AGAIN
"I've never had a one-night stand in my life. In fact, I won't be having sex again until I'm married."

"I was so nervous," recalls Toni of her first sessions with Babyface. "The whole time I was on my way to the studio I kept thinking, Suppose I get there and he doesn't like my voice anymore? Toni has worked with various topflight producers, including David Foster and Windy City soulman R. Kelly (whom she calls "Amadeus"), but it's her relationship with Babyface that has created the true gems in her repertoire.

"Well, first of all he's silly, and he always beats me at Pac-Man," she says of the Babyface experience. And Toni's quick to point out that "Face is not merely a Svengali pulling her puppet strings. "It's important to him that the artist comes out in the songs instead of just him. 'Sing like you,' he would say. Or 'Give me some water on that'—which means that there's certain words he doesn't want to understand.

"I'm still occasionally in awe of him," Toni continues, her voice serious now, "but at the same time I have to remember something Patti LaBelle said to me: 'Toni, L.A. and Babyface are fabulous, and you love them, but don't ever forget it's a collaboration. You guys did it together.' That way I don't get caught in other people's shadows.

"The worst thing about being a crossover success," she adds, "is when I look in *Billboard* and see my records are lower on the R&B charts than on the pop charts. I don't ever want to be the kind of artist who abandons her base audience." Yet on her most recent tour, Toni coheadlined with elevator-jazz saxophonist Kenny G and ran afoul of a group of black promoters in the process. "They were accusing me of not wanting to work with them. I understand they've helped my career and took a chance on me in the beginning," says Toni, who opened for Frankie Beverly a few years back. (She's headlining a tour this summer in conjunction with the Jamison tour hosted by VIBE and Magic Johnson.) "I took all those things into consideration. At the same time I felt, I'm having a nervous breakdown, and I need 60mg of Prozac." Kidding aside, Toni admits, "It kinda upset me more than a lot. They would ask me, 'Do you consider yourself a black artist?' Yeah, I look at myself everyday," she declares. "This color ain't coming off."

Personal transformation comes at a hefty price. For every new success, there are those who remain unimpressed. But Toni seems to have more than her fair share of vicious rumors that are swimming like piranha in the infested waters of entertainment media. She's been accused of breaking up the NBA's Dallas Mavericks by setting off a feud

between two of its stars. "I never met Jason Kidd or Jimmy Jackson," she says, rolling her eyes at the mention of the well-worn controversy. "About a year ago, this reporter asked me if I had dated one or kissed the other, and me, trying to be cute, said, Well, I'll never kiss and tell. It's amazing how one year people are accusing me of being a lesbian, and the next year I'm a whore who dated the entire NBA." Both Jackson, who now plays with the Nets, and Kidd, currently with Phoenix, have strenuously denied any involvement with Toni.

Gossip has linked Toni to a variety of other men, including Maxwell, Dennis Rodman, and Groove Theorist Bryce Wilson, who cowrote and stars in the video for "Makin' Me High." All she'll confirm is her fling with Wilson. "He's a cutie," she says coyly. "We did date for a while, but it's kind of difficult because we're in the same business. That makes it hard to maintain a relationship." Wilson says he enjoyed working with Toni. Anything else? "We're friends," is all he says, with a wicked grin.

Toni says her current love interest is a guy who's "not in the industry." As for his identity: "That's my secret." Looking for clues, I ask her what she looks for in a man, and a devilish expression appears. "We could be here all day talking about the black man," Toni's speaking in her Jackie voice, rubbing her small hands together. "That is a fascinating subject. I suppose what turns me on is the black man's walk. He can be blind and cross-eyed at the same time, but if he got that walk...."

I decide to go for mine. So after the walk, what would be your criteria for having sex with a person?

"I've never had a one-night stand in my life," she says. "My criteria for having sex now is, I have to be damn near in love with the person. In fact, I've recently decided that I wouldn't be having sex again until I'm married."

Why is that? I ask, hearing the depressed sighs of a nation of men.

"Well, it's not like I was in the broths and now I have to air myself out," she says with a giggle. "A guy might be able to slow me down, but he's not going to break me. Anything that puts me in temptation, I'm resisting."

As she drains her glass of water, the small ice cubes click together, and Toni takes me to the shrine where a stash of Soul Train / American Music / *Billboard* / Grammy Awards are proudly displayed. "Anita Baker told me once that I should learn to enjoy my moments because I rarely get a chance to exhale," Miss Braxton proclaims. "I don't want to wake up one day and be fifty years old talking about how fly I used to be." □

ON MAY 16

ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE



TODD McFARLANE'S

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STAIRWAY



Even if you ain't 'bout Master P, someone's on his side. Tony Green travels

It's Friday night inside No Limit Records' New Orleans offices, and the crew are shooting the gift around a table stocked with beer, snow-crab legs, and seafood pizza. Members of the Beats by the Pound production team are cloistered inside the studio off to the side, getting busy making tracks. Rapper Mystikal reclines in an office chair underneath a wall-size mural of the cover from *The Ghetto's Tyjin' to Kill Me*, 1992's

underground hit by label CEO Master P, who, at the moment, is previewing a few tracks from his upcoming album, *Ghetto Dope*.

Point-guard tall in a black company T-shirt and athletic gear, P, whose real name is Percy Miller, bobs his head to the thudding funk rumbling from the speakers. He resembles a label CEO about as much as his office resembles the place that is, to quote one of its

products, "supplying the world with that gangsta music." From the outside, the second-floor landing looks like it might be a travel agency.

Don't be fooled. Even P's detractors admit that he's just this side of marketing genius. How else could he turn a former record store into one of the most successful black-owned, independent record labels in the country, churning out the most unapologetically

T O H E A V E N

Photographs by Dana Lixenberg



to New Orleans to see if No Limit Records really is a gangsta's paradise

gangstacentric material on the shelves? At a time when hardcore rap has turned into hip hop's public relations nightmare, P releases product with lyrics like "Long live the motherfuckin' drug dealers." At a time when images attract as much attention as statistics, the more semiotically inclined would have a field

day with the uncensored cover of Kane and Abel's *The 7 Sins*, which adorns another office wall: two black men pointing pistols at each other; a model presenting an apple and her thong-cleft butt as the prize—brothers shooting each other over the booty. And Master P doesn't plan to let up anytime soon.

Oh, and the name of the song he's grooving to right now? "Bitches and Blunts."

"I just know what people want," says P, 27, explaining his ever-growing success. "They want more for their money—a lot of good songs, instead of one song and a bunch of ad-libs. Beats and funk."

The numbers certainly bear him out. *West Coast Bad Boyz Compilation II* debuted at No. 8 on the *Billboard* Pop charts earlier this year. In 1995 Tru (made up of P, Silk the Shocker, and C-Murder) released *True*, which sold more than 200,000 units and spawned the Sun Belt anthem "I'm Bout It, Bout It." Their sec-

and album, *Tru 2 da Game*, moved more than 300,000 units within months of its February release. P's first two solo releases have sold more than a 100,000 combined, and last year's *Ice Cream Man* is nearly gold and counting. And those figures don't even count the numbers he does with his core customers, the ones buying at the neighborhood mom-and-pop—places SoundScan doesn't track.

For Master P, success isn't a matter of hype, images, and controversy; it's pragmatism, plain and simple. Knowing what you want and doing what you need to do to get it; living small for a while so that you can live large later. Machiavelli's real significance wasn't that he spoke of faking death but that he helped define the idea of long-term strategy.

So slam if you want. Turn up your nose at the remakes (Levert's "Pop Goes My Mind" winds up as "Pop Goes My Nine"). Recoil at the relentless barrage of drugs, guns, and money—much of it rapped as if the past five violent years in hip hop never happened. All you have to do is look at the "if you only knew" expression on his face when he estimates his company's 1996 profits at "over a million."

"People are all about getting the quick buck and never think about the long term, about building a foundation," P says. "They think, 'Oh, man, let me run and do this, and let me run and do that.' I like it when people talk about how I'm stupid and country. 'Cause when they start thinking that, that's when I beat 'em.'"

Despite its party-time image and rich cultural history, New Orleans has earned a deserved rep as a murder hotspot. The Crescent City averaged 378 murders a year between 1994 and 1996. But despite the infamy of public housing, only a fraction of the city's murders occurs there. The crime rate for B.W. Cooper Apartments (formerly Calliope Apartments, where P, the oldest of five kids, started out) has dropped dramatically in the past few years, according to Yvonne Marrero, president of the property's Resident Management Corporation. Thanks to a police substation and an on-site officer liaison, things are on the upswing. But it was pretty rough in the past, Marrero says. One year, she remembers, there were 20 murders.

"Calliope was one of the worst neighborhoods you could even think about," P recalls. "People think of New Orleans, they think of tourism and Mardi Gras and all that. But there's another side. I had to grow up never having nothing, and in life, you gotta be down to survive." That side of New Orleans is the centerpiece of his upcoming movie *I'm Bout It*, roughly based on P's life and set to star—guess who?

Seem strange? Far-fetched? Well, so did an Oscar-nominated movie about a skin-mag baron. Besides, P speaks about the movie as if its success is already a foregone conclusion.

"We put fliers in every *Ice Cream Man* album, and we shipped a million of them. So, if you figure a million kids bought the Master P album, then that's how many people are going to want to see the movie. Basically, I have created such a demand for this movie, it would be crazy for any distributor not to want a piece of it."

P's parents divorced when he was 11, and from age 15 on, he shuffled between his mother in Richmond, Calif. and his paternal grandmother in New Orleans.

When asked about the root of all the drug references on his records and interviews (he calls the music business "space-age hustling"), P waxes vague. He does admit that the life cost him a brother, who was killed over a drug deal. As far as his own involvement in the life, well, he pleads the Fifth. "I was always a hustler," he said. "I did whatever I could to make ends meet."

After spending seventh and eighth grade in Catholic school, P transferred to New Orleans's Booker T. Washington High. "I was in a bad school in a bad situation," he says. "I remember people getting killed there. There was one kid who owed somebody some money, and this guy came up in the school with a gun. He came right up into the classroom, and the kid was hiding in a closet."



REBEL WITH A CAUSE
"Dying without leaving something to show [for your life]... that's something I can't understand."

et. The guy just took out the gun and fired right through the closet door. Killed him."

After a brief career as a scholarship basketball player (including a walk-on slot at the University of Houston), he moved back to Richmond and studied business at Merritt Junior College in Oakland. In the late '80s, he used \$10,000 he inherited from his grandfather to start No Limit Records, then a retail operation in Richmond. That experience taught him a lot about the tastes of the grassroots rap public.

First off, a lot of people weren't getting enough of the raw, street-style rap, "the stuff the major labels didn't want," P says. Also, the tastes of the West often parallel those of the South—both love lots of bass, laid-back beats, and funk-oriented production. Finally, the average buyer isn't impressed with a lot of the pop-culture hype 'n' bullshit. So when he expanded No Limit into record production in 1990, he was ready. He had his first hit in 1991 with the underground *The Ghetto Is Tryin' to Kill Me*. The first edition of *West Coast Bad Boyz*, which

featured E-40 and Rappin' 4-Tay, stayed on the *Billboard* R&B charts for more than half a year.

"Your music is what the people are paying for," says P. "That's all. People call up, say 'we want such-and-such.' We say, 'Well, here it is coming to you FedEx.' It's like the fends out on the street. They don't care who you say you are; they don't wanna hear no shit like 'I did this and that, I'm so-an-so, I made three dollars yesterday.' All they wanna know is, 'Where the dope at?'"

That's why high-volume production is the rule at No Limit. Between April 1996 and March 1997, the label released seven albums, including Silk's the Shocker's *The Shocker*, Skull Duggrey's *Hoodlum Fo Life*, and Mia X's *Good Girl Gone Bad*. All made noise on the charts.

Silk debuted at No. 6 on the R&B charts, while *Hoodlum* and *7 Sinz* both opened at No. 29. *Ice Cream Man* debuted at No. 3 with virtually no video or radio play.

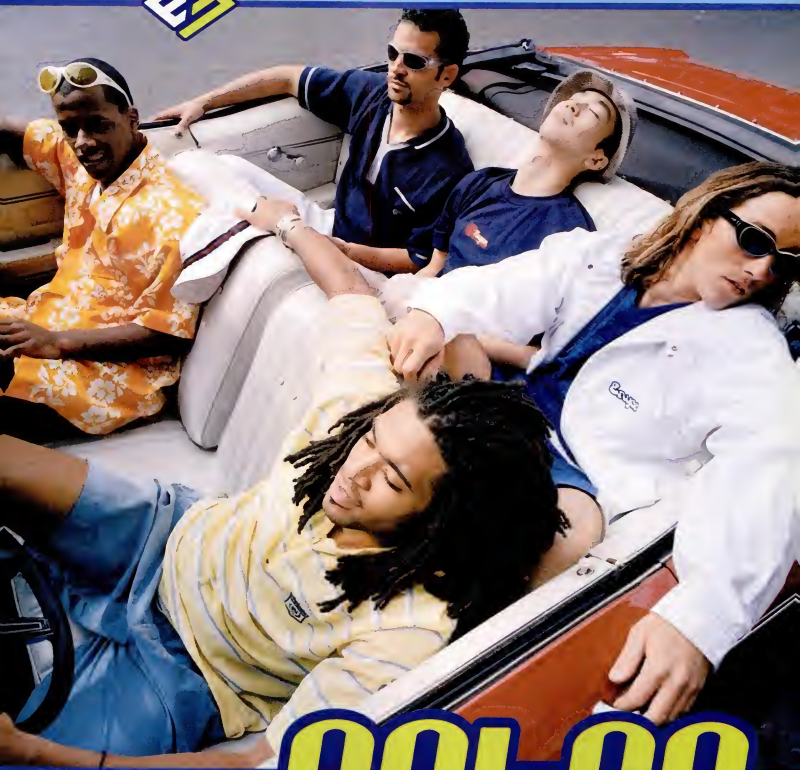
It's important to keep your name out there, says Craig B. of the Beats by the Pound production crew (which includes Mo B. Dick and KLC), whose eerie, psycho-funk tracks fuel No Limit. Two years in the studio? That's a formula for falling off. When C-Murder talks about an album taking a long time, he means two months. If P really wants it out, two weeks. And they're not shy about borrowing from established material, even while it's fresh. Aaliyah's "If Your Girl Only Knew" gets reworked into "Fedz" on *Tru 2 da Game*. C-Murder heard that track driving from Baton Rouge in November, and within two days, it was on the album.

"I thought this could be a good track here, so I went in and had Mo B. Dick put it together—he's our man on R&B," says C-Murder, whose soft-spoken demeanor belies his stage name. "I'm usually the one who comes up with that stuff. I'll hear something, then go out and buy the CD and play it for Mo B. That's what sells, giving people something they recognize, but with a little different flavor. We'll always hear that negative talk about it, but fans love that kind of stuff."

In the post-Biggie/Tupac furor, it's impossible to talk about hardcore rap without at least acknowledging the controversy surrounding its alleged connection to real-life black pathology. It's more useful, however, to look at it as hip hop's equivalent of heavy metal: substitute Tigger Gore for C. DeLores Tucker and you have the '80s all over again. P got his first taste of unwanted notoriety in 1991 when a West Coast teen used his single "211" as part of a "gangsta rap" defense in an armed robbery trial. Still, he defends his rights to say what he wants to say on his records.

"This is America," P says unapologetically. "You got people out there doing pornography, phone sex—whatever you want to get into, it's out there. So I don't see how someone can come at me for doing what I'm doing. We don't sell gimmicks. You don't hear us talking about other rappers on our records. I don't want to be judged as a gangsta rapper, I want to be judged as someone who kicked reality. Someone who talked about life and the struggle in our communities."

To be sure, the reality defense comes across as facile; not all gangsta rappers live the life, and not everyone who lives the life raps about it—at least not all the time. Harsh living conditions can produce everything from jazz trumpeters to vocal divas. Yvonne Marrero isn't a



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THINK AGAIN

"I like when people think I'm stupid and country. 'Cause that's when I beat 'em."

En of gongs van ("All that falling women out of their names"), but she does acknowledge that P's success is an inspiration to many young men in Cooper Apartments, who regard him as "a brother out there making it." To them, she says, the important thing isn't what P does, but how he did it—one step at a time, going from nothing to something. Getting his.

You hear that phrase a lot in the black South: "Genting yours"—your own record store, publishing business, construction company, whatever. And it's possible, if you're patient and you stay in control of yours. For average folks, that means walking across the room to pick up the phone book rather than dialing information—dimes add up. For independent-minded lads, it means driving your own ride instead of having the company send you a limo that's being paid for out of your cut. Save long enough, watch the bottom line, and you can eventually sit out in front of your paid-for house with a cold drink next to the Cadillac Supreme you only pull out on Sunday.

Or in P's case, the cream Mercedes 600 SL in which he rolls over to Baton Rouge Beach's Stanford Park for an interview with the *Box*. He, C-Murder, Silk, and Mia X are in full athletic gear, playing to the camera crew against an old-money-ish waterside backdrop. The Roots' "What They Do" video, which spoofed hip-hop video clichés (from the "beatsdown" scene to the "mansion" scene) obviously wasn't talking about Master P.

"Look at it this way," P says, rising out of his chair after arriving back at No Limit. "You have a product—a rap product. It belongs to you. And you're just going to give somebody else a five percent of what you make in that product? To do what? Organize your life, basically. Call you up in the morning and tell you to be across town at such and such a time."

"Shweet," comes the Crescent City drawl, in full effect. "I can wake my own damn self up."

Nearly all of the No Limit business is self-contained. The only thing connected with a major label is a distribution deal with Priority. The few hundred grand P dropped on his studio has paid off big time. He doesn't have to fight for the right to pay \$1,000 an hour to use someone else's facility, which also makes it easier to turn out product. And you can't trust just anybody with your stuff, since you never know who's going to turn on you. His brother Kevin Miller was murdered by a friend. So P employs family members. Mo.B. Dick, a trained musician who handles a lot of the production duties, is a cousin. Silk the Shoemaker and C-Murder are P's little brothers.

It's all about staying in control of your shit. If you don't, somebody else will wind up with it. "That's rap's real tragedy," P says. Artists trying to walk before they can crawl, and winding up walking in the end.

"I want to be the man," he goes on, "I could say, I want this here. When somebody else owns a company, and you get yourself involved in verbal combat with another person, and the other guy benefits from that. It makes all the listeners to provide the money." Dying without a cause, without knowing something to show for it, that's something I can't understand. □



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ZAP MAMA

Society of soul

Zap Mama founder Marie Daulne wants to spread her message as wide as possible—no racial/cultural/musical hair-splitting allowed in her universe. “I grew up in Belgium with the Catholic sounds and harmonies of my father’s family,” says the dazzling 32-year-old singer. “You turn on the radio, it’s French and American music; but my African mother sings like the Pygmies. All those musics and attitudes are in me.”

This contempo griot, born during the Belgian Congo revolution, was an infant when her Belgian father was killed; her Bantu mother escaped with her four biracial children. Zap Mama (conceptualized by Daulne, “Zap” represents Zaire, change, and culture; “Mama” is literal, as well as a sound from the earth) grew out of Daulne’s first visit to her mother’s Zairean village, at age 20. “In the beginning, I tried to re-create what I heard in Africa with European harmonies, but I

created something like an orchestra of man and woman. Somehow, I ended up with five women.” Daulne put it on wax for Zap Mama’s wicked, eponymous 1993 debut LP and blew away world-music heads, as did *Sabsyima* the next year.

[7], the group’s third album, expands the Pygmy-Inna-Europe premise by including inspired instrumentation and the ballast of male voices. Spearhead’s Michael Franti raps silky smooth and deadly side with Daulne’s Islamic vocalizations in “Baba Hooker,” while veteran

deejay Daddy U-Roy’s reggae rap on “New World” lends weight and history to the song’s one-drop dreams of better to come.

Though Daulne aspires to be “a bridge between two cultures,” she also spans the gulf between society and the soul. And since that first trip home, Daulne, who now lives in Brussels, Belgium, has visited Africa every two years, “each time to understand better,” she says. “But I don’t want to stop with my Zairean culture; I want to discover others.” Daulne’s point can’t be underscored enough: We’ve got common ground, and we should stand on it more often.

Elena Oumano

Ernest Dickerson
Filmmaker

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KEEP ON PUSHIN'

Can the solutions to our problems at home be found in embracing a global struggle for nonviolence? By David Bry

The murders of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls have sucked the hope out of many of us in the hip hop community. With so much pain and so few remedies in sight, it's difficult to imagine a better day. But Beastie Boy Adam Yauch and Q-Tip from A Tribe Called Quest believe that a solution lies in expanding our consciousness across the globe.

Last June, Yauch and the Milarepa Fund—a nonprofit organization devoted to spreading the message of nonviolence through music—brought 100,000 screaming kids into San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. For two days, artists such as Smashing Pumpkins, the Fugees, the Foo Fighters, and A Tribe Called Quest rocked in the name of freedom for Tibet, a small Himalayan country that is currently occupied by China's military. Tibet's spiritual leader is the Dalai Lama, now in involuntary exile.

Inspired by refugee monks he met at the concert, Q-Tip became interested in the political situation in Kashmir. Long a site of violent religious conflict, this mostly Muslim Indian state has been caught in a custody battle between the governments of India and neighboring Pakistan. This autumn, Tip plans to organize a benefit concert in support of the autonomy of Kashmir.

Meanwhile, this June 7 and 8 in New York, Milarepa will stage a sequel to the Tibetan Freedom Concert. At press time, they hadn't announced the lineup but were talking to artists like U2, De La Soul, and Biz Markie. In light of recent events in the rap world, though, the emphasis will be shifted slightly to highlight a major component of Tibet's struggle: the practice of nonviolence. A few weeks before that concert, VIBE discussed universal solutions to worldly problems with two of hip hop's leading activists.

The recent tragedies in the hip hop community point to a disturbing fact: For some people, the term "keeping it real" has come to mean leading a violent lifestyle and carrying a gun. How can we change that?

Tip: Well, for some people, reality is, "I gotta carry a gun because I sell drugs." But reality is also, "Eventually, I'm either gonna get killed or wind up in jail." So which reality do you want? Do you want to continue to chance it? To go to jail or be in a casket? People need to weigh the consequences of their choices. The only way we can make a change is through personal choices.

Yauch: One thing I've learned from traveling a lot is that, all over the world, people are people. You know? My exposure to Tibetan culture has taught me a lot about the truth and reality. The value that they put on nonviolence is really inspirational.

Tip: Right now, there's a climate of danger, a climate of urgency—of doing whatever you have to do to survive. When you're living in building tenements—and on TV you see Eva Gabor talkin' 'bout *Green Acres* and shit like that—you're looking at that on TV as, "That's the way to be." Then you step outside your house and see John-John on the corner selling dope bags, and little Ralphie pushin' a Cadillac, shit like that. That's your *Green Acres*.

To a young kid with no spirituality, you don't have anything to fall back on but that TV show or that movie. But if you're deep rooted in spirituality, when you see something that's negative, you can easily equate it to something that will get you in trouble. You won't really have a desire toward that negative. And even if you do, you'll understand your own nature. You'll know why you desire these things, and you'll be able to subdue that desire.

Yauch: I definitely agree with Tip. Getting more in touch with spirituality, understanding that part of yourself, getting more understanding of why we're here. I think it's real important. Otherwise, life can become pretty meaningless and destructive. We're all tied up with our pride and our egos. We're taught that if somebody hurts you, you strike back at them. But just that striking back amounts to such a loss of control, a person is more likely to get hurt worse, or even hurt themselves. Nonviolence is often looked at as weakness, but there's actually much more power to be found in the self-control of nonviolent response. People like Gandhi and Martin Luther King and the Dalai Lama have accomplished so much through mastery of that type of thinking.

Tip: The people of Kashmir didn't choose to have guns put to their heads or be raped. They didn't invite terrorists or guerrillas into their places of worship. These people are helpless. And the media has no vested interest in what's going on there, because of what America has to gain from India economically. And because they're Muslim. Islam has constantly been dealt unfair blows. The media for years and years has been painting this cruel and blatantly untrue picture of what Islam truly is. It's a beautiful faith. I mean, *Islam*. The word itself means "one of peace."

Yauch: So, Tip, can I put you on the spot in the magazine and ask you if you're gonna play at our concert?

Tip: You're gonna do mine, right?

Yauch: Yup.

Tip: I don't think that'll be a problem, man.

Yauch: All right. Cool. ☐

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAYSON KEELING



GRUDGE

MATCH

WHAT FOUL?
Carolyn gets
mugged by OJ

**Can three playground
ballers hang with top female
professionals?**

**Jesse Washington and
company bang bodies with
a trio of stars from the
American Basketball League.**

Photographs by Exum

It's getting close to halftime, and Betty Waller Gray is *running* this basketball court. She absolutely owns it. So what if she's a 51-year-old computer analyst with a graying Afro, the crowd is giving her the kind of love usually reserved for slam dunks and three-pointers. During a time-out, the Richmond Rage's No. 1 fan boogies onto the hardwood, does sloppy cartwheels from one end to the other, then finishes by plopping into a split that strains the seams of her bulging red sweatsuit. I'm on my feet with the rest of the crowd, pumping my fist and shouting as loud as I can.

Gray paid \$1,000 for a pair of court-side season tickets, and she can get open before thousands of other fans because this is the American Basketball League. This is women's professional hoops, and it's far removed from the overpriced, sanitized, made-for-TV world of male jockdom. The ABL is fan friendly: Gray, her 15-year-old daughter, Leonty, and other spectators chill with Rage players in the arena after games.

The ABL is low budget: Reporters have to call in their stories collect from the Rage's pressroom. But above all, the ABL is about ball-in-yo'-grill, fast-paced, come-through-the-lane-and-get-it-back basketball.

Long ignored in this highlight-hungry era, women's professional basketball—which has thrived in other countries for decades—finally blew up in America last summer. To prepare for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the U.S. women's team—backed by the mighty National Basketball Association—barnstormed the country, drawing big crowds and TV ratings, and winning all 52 games. When they got to Atlanta, their fire and desire made the U.S. men's team look like it was sleepwalking. By the time the women won the gold,



they'd become the *real* Dream Team.

This June, the Women's National Basketball Association, owned and operated by the billion-dollar corporation that is the NBA, tips off with some marquee names: Lisa Leslie, Sheryl Swoopes, Rebecca Lobo, and 37-year-old pioneer Lynette Woodard (the first female to run the Globetrotters). The rival ABL, founded by six associates with business and sports backgrounds, played its first game in October 1996; this March came the first championship series—between the Rage and the Columbus Quest—where we rejoin Mrs. Gray at courtside.

Game 3 resumes, and I sit back to enjoy what coaching guru John Wooden calls "the best pure basketball being played today." Rage point guard Dawn Staley is dropping more dimes than that Brinks truck in Miami. The Quest's Nikki McCray is fearlessly taking it to the hole, spinning and elbowing to carve out a path through a swarm of bodies. But as the game swings back and forth, a thought simmers deep in my brain, Yo, I can *take* these women.

Admit it, fellas: in our heart of hearts, we know that none of those female ballers can hold us. We're too strong, got too much hops. I'm six foot four, 195 pounds, can rain threes for days and hold my own on any playground—how can some woman stop me? I'm too young for Cheryl Miller; too strong for Lisa Leslie. Ain't a woman alive can give me the business.

And so, testosterone surging, I set out to answer the question that may determine the future of women's professional basketball in this country: Can a man ever accept a female as his athletic superior?

I realize I'm in trouble when Carolyn Jones hits a fallaway 20-footer in my face. The three-on-three battle of the sexes that VIBE has arranged at the Reebok Sports Club in Manhattan has just begun, and my squad's already down 3-0.

Carolyn, a five-foot-nine guard, led the ABL in scoring, averaging 21.2 points per game for the New England Blizzard. Her teammates today are Crystal Robinson, a five-foot-eleven forward with the Colorado Xplosion, who was seventh in the league in scoring with 17.1 ppg, and Sheri Sam, a six-foot-one forward who averaged 14.4 points for the San Jose Lasers. All three women made the All-Star team; Crystal was the ABL rookie of the year; Carolyn won a bronze medal with the 1992 Olympic team.

My team's hoop credentials are more humble: me and Joe D'Ambrosia, my homie from the YMCA, played college ball, OJ Lima, a former high-school sixth man, is VIBE's research chief. I warn them that these women can shoot—Crystal made 43 percent of her threes this season; Carolyn 41 percent—and that they'll set mad picks to free themselves for open jumpers. "No problem, I'll just go right through 'em," says OJ confidently, flexing his wide shoulders.

Actually, it is a problem. When these sisters set picks, they don't stand in place like guys do, hands cupped over groins. They raise their arms in front of their breasts, plant two elbows dead in your chest, and shove harder than a schoolyard bully. The result, in this contest, is three straight J's to start the game.

We're playing to 15 by once, so there's plenty of time to recover from 3-0. Trouble is, the gap is widening. Crystal gets the ball on the wing, and I close in with a hand up. She starts her shooting motion, then flashes past me for a layup. OJ lays off Sheri at the foul line—swish. Sheri turns her back to the basket, dribbles OJ to within eight feet of the hoop, and lofts a fallaway jumper. Money. "Ooooooh, Sheri, take that nigga!" hollers Saudia Roundtree, the Atlanta Glory point guard, watching from the sideline with an injured knee. "He can't hold you! He a scrub!" 6-zip. Uh-oh.

"It's male pride, y'knowhat! 'msayin'?" says Rage forward Adrienne Goodson—an NCAA champion, six-year pro, and ABL All-Star—explaining why men always challenge her. "Even if you knew my skills were tight and we played and you *knew* I was better than you, you guys would never admit it! You would continue to talk smack to me. That's just how guys are."

Male ego may also help explain why, despite ticket prices of \$12 and \$15, the Rage's home arena is only half full when Game 3 of the championship series begins. As soon as the ball (regulation men's size) goes up for the tip, war erupts on the court. Forearms are planted in backs; shoulders slam into chests; loose balls disappear under piles of diving bodies. Now *this* is a game I could love.

By the end of the third quarter, the Rage are holding off the Quest, and the crowd in the University of Richmond's Robins Center has grown to 6,879 delirious fans. Dawn Staley runs the Richmond break to perfection, slipperier than a watermelon seed, cutting so hard I hear her sneakers squeak over the roar of the crowd. Rage center Taj McWilliams is unstoppable down low. Since the refs aren't calling any fouls, the action resembles an all-star playground tussle—and it's entertaining as hell.

With 33 seconds to go, the Rage have a 70-67 lead and the ball. After a wild



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YIPKES GOT A BRAND NEW BAZ'D

sequence of hockeylike collisions and missed three-pointers, McWilliams emerges under the Rage basket with ball held high. She hits a streaking Goodson for a layup to ice the win. Mrs. Gray cartwheels to mid-court, her daughter leads a charge of fans onto the floor, and the Rage pull ahead in the best-of-five series, two games to one.

"That was one of the roughest games of the year," Staley, who won a gold medal in Atlanta, tells me later. "But once you get to this level, it's anybody's game; so you do anything to win—elbows, a cheap shot when the ref isn't looking. It's all part of the game."

Now I know these women can play: They're cheating! The toughest players shove points, deny fouls, and, above all, argue. We fight back to 7-4, using our height and weight to get some easy baskets down low. I hit a free jump shot; Joe D., at six foot four, takes the much shorter Carolyn to the hoop. Then I come off a pick, rise for a jumper—and Crystal taps me lightly but deliberately on the nuts. Clank! A few plays later she looks at me and says, "You have pretty eyes."

Saudia's snice may be broke, but her mouth is working overtime. "Lookatcha! You weak!" she yells when OJ drives the lane and gets his shot blocked. Carolyn is showboating, getting the ball at the top of the key and pausing to play with her hair scrunchy before shooting. She misses, but later breaks Joe D. off fiercely with a nutter crossover that turns him completely around. Crystal is making a habit of head-faking me into the air and dribbling to the hoop; she has the bang time to jump now and shoot later.

I have to bust my butt every play to keep up, and I'm getting tired. These women play that rarest of playground commodities: fundamental ball. We get caught napping on backdoor passes, and they negate our size with smart help defense. The highlight of the day comes when Crystal flashes to the wing, drawing OJ with her. She changes direction, rises to catch the pass, bangs, and banks in a reverse layup. Next thing I know, it's 11-5.

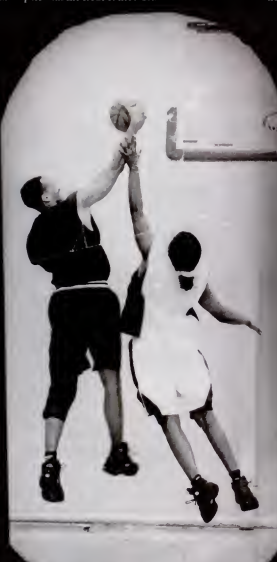
I just wish we could have the same paychecks as the men," sighs the Quest's Nikki McCray, sporting a fresh black eye as we relax in the Holiday Inn lobby after Game 4. McCray didn't shoot well, but her defense on Goodson—plus Katie Smith's 23 points and Valerie Still's 22 points and 16 boards—gave Columbus a 95-84 win. The series is tied 2-2 and heading back to Ohio.

Average salary in the ABL is \$70,000; as an Olympic gold medalist, McCray makes \$125,000 and has a sneaker contract. Yet here she is, one of the best basketball players in the world, staying in a hotel where half the rooms open onto the parking lot. But McCray's just grateful to be playing in America. Until now, female college stars had to continue their careers overseas, where the pay can easily reach six figures—but isolation and culture shock take their toll. Goodson swallowed a \$30,000 pay cut to leave Brazil for the ABL.

"It's great to finally have your family and friends come out and watch you play," says Quest shooting guard Tonya "Ice" Edwards. "Overseas you only get visitors once every two or three months. You only play once a week, and you're depressed all the time. It's great to be home, and to be part of history."

History isn't usually made in a grubby Holiday Inn. But the players' perks should get better if, as many predict, the ABL merges with its upscale sister league. The

WNBA, mindful of the crowded sports landscape in the winter and spring, chose to play a 10-week, 28-game summer season. It will have three games a week on national TV; one each on NBC, ESPN, and Lifetime. ABL games aired on the SportsChannel Regional Network and BET. Although the ABL's founders are committed to playing a full 40 games during the normal basketball season, it'll be tough for them to compete with the clout of the NBA.



Jesse and Sheri crash the boards

The transformation of women's basketball is personified by Lynette Woodard. A 1981 graduate of the University of Kansas, she has scored more points than any college player except Pete Maravich and Travis Grant. In 1984 she was on the first American women's team to win Olympic gold. But there were no sneaker deals or American leagues waiting for her. Why now? "They know the game can be packaged and sold," says Woodard, a Wall Street stockbroker who was lured out of a five-year retirement by the prospect of an American audience. "My game is smooth as ever," says Woodard. "I know I'm going to shock a lot

of people. I mean, they saw me with the Globetrotters, but that's not my real game."

The Quest has several dozen fans who've followed their team all the way to Richmond. And though I've been fighting the thought all weekend, I can't help but notice the lack of men among the entourage at the Holiday Inn. Like tennis and golf, women's basketball must deal with the assumption that a disproportionate number of the players and spectators are gay.

"In the past, people thought if you were aggressive on the court, you were going to be butch and aggressive off the court," says Rebecca Lobo. "People accept now that a woman can be aggressive and competitive on the floor, and off the floor be a feminine woman."

Whenever the subject of basketball and sexuality arises, so does the name Lisa Leslie. A six-foot-five center and the favorite to throw down the WNBA's first dunk, Leslie wears lipstick on the court and models off it. She's the perfect antidote to fools who are intimidated by women with triceps. "I tell all these little teenage girls, 'Tuck your shirts in, pull your shorts up; you don't have to have them saggin,'" Leslie says on the phone from her hometown of L.A. "I think so many mothers and fathers appreciate that. Sometimes that is the biggest fear—about there being so many lesbians involved in the game of basketball."

In the decisive fifth game, Ice Edwards catches fire, scoring 23 points to lead the Quest to the first ABL championship. The series MVP is the Quest's Valerie Still, a 36-year-old center who gave birth to a son, Aaron, 13 months earlier. "It's been a real experience," she says at a press conference. Aaron gurgling on her lap. "Hopefully, this will be like the NBA 50 years from now."

And it just might. The ABL averaged a healthy 3,500 fans per game this season. Companies from Sears to General Motors are lining up to sponsor women's ball. Half-a-million girls are playing in high school. "The game now has progressed to where it has a chance," says ABL cofounder and CEO Gary Cavalli. "And not just the quality of the game has progressed. NCAA attendance has quadrupled. Basketball is the number one youth-participation sport for boys and girls. Women are role models. All this is telling us that the time is right."

Sheri is using all 175 of her pounds to back me toward the hoop, and for a second I wish I was in the dance-hall instead of the gym. I'm too exhausted to keep up with the women, who just don't miss open shots. So I've turned into the Butcher—fouling anyone who comes near. In one swift I catch Sheri with an elbow and don't even feel guilty when she grabs her breast in pain. The women match our tactics, and the game gets even rougher. Joe D. is reluctant to call fouls, so he gets hammered. OJ's tongue is hanging out, and that damn broke-back Saudia smells blood. "OJ, they ain't even passin' you the ball! They playin' two-on-one! It's over! It's over!" After a few especially hard fouls, Crystal picks herself up off the floor with a scowl. She plays well angry, and that's had news for us. Final score: 15-7.

"I'd all be better than most guys I've played with," I offer grudgingly after my team wrestles its way to a two-point win in the rematch.

But the women aren't having it. "Why can't you just say, 'Saudia shoots back, that's all are good basketball players?'"

COMMUNITY



Geta Aslaw's idea of neighborhood involvement began in his home of Ethiopia, and he continues it today as a McDonald's® owner in Denver. Geta sponsors programs like the NAACP Voter Registration Drive, school book drives, and his own special free Thanksgiving Day dinner to seniors, which attracts up to 300 people a year.



Being the owners of five San Diego McDonald's, Harold and Tina Lewis have been part of the community for over 10 years. In addition to supporting local causes such as UNCF, Black Law Enforcement Network, and a drug abuse education program, the couple started the McDonald's AVAIL (African-American Visionary And Inspirational Leaders) Scholarship Program, awarding over \$125,000 in scholarships in 1996 alone to local high school seniors.



Theda Rudd's love of children and education, combined with being a successful owner of six McDonald's, keep her a busy member of the Lansing community. Not only is Theda chairing a board to open an area Ronald McDonald House, but she also volunteers time reading to and speaking with school children of all ages. Each year, she even offers three of her McDonald's employees scholarships to her alma mater, Michigan State University.

WE'RE GLAD TO BE IN A POSITION TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

THE RELEASE OF HIS SIXTH AL-

BUM, *WATERBED HEV*, FINDS

HEAVY D

RETHINKING HIS EXECUTIVE GIG,

BUILDING AN ACTING CAREER,

AND DEALING WITH PERSONAL

LOSS. BUT BIG DADDY'S STILL

GIVING THANKS AND SPREAD-

ING LOVE. *BY SHANI SAXON*

HIS OWN



Everybody's mother loves Heavy D. Maybe because they saw him rhyme in a Michael or Janet Jackson video and thought he looked like a nice, nonthreatening rapper. Hip hop lovers respect Jamaican-born Dwight Myers because he's never changed his style to fit the trends. Not too many people would name Hev as their favorite MC, but his songs—like 1989's "We Got Our Own Thang," with its infectious "diddy, diddy, dee" chant—keep them dancing.

After five albums, three of which went platinum, Heavy D's returned with *Waterbed Hev*, which doesn't stray too far from the shake-your-ass, people-loving music we've all come to expect from him. But what the songs don't say is that while he's elated with his soaring acting career, Heavy is coping with the recent death of his brother, along with frustrations about his nine to five as president of Uptown Records. Art ain't exactly imitating life.

On a clear, chilly Manhattan day, 29-year-old Heavy D is waiting to tape a segment for BET's *Rap City*. His mood is quiet and rather blasé. After all, he's been doing this for 10 years. Even though he says he enjoys the songs on *Waterbed Hev*, promoting albums isn't as exciting as it used to be. Given the fickle nature of hip hop fans, Hev knows there will probably come a time when he'll stop recording to focus on his other talents. "On this album, although it's good, I feel like it's the same Heavy D," he says matter-of-factly. "That's not great to me, it's good to other people, but they'll get tired of that eventually. When I get to the point where I feel like that's all I can do, then I'll have enough, and they'll have enough."

But Heavy's face lights up when he describes the time he and *Goodfellas* heavy Paul Sorvino (whom he describes as "one of the illest niggas out") sat up in an L.A. cigar bar ad-libbing dramatic dialogue. It's clear he'd rather be reliving this moment than doing almost anything else. "He played a godfather, and I played one of his workers," Heavy says, all animated. "I had to tell Paul that we needed to kill this other guy's brother. He kept asking me why. I kept having to dig deeper, deeper." Hev laughs shyly at the memory. "I love acting. And I know I'ma take it to places people ain't even thinkin' about."

Hev has been dabbling in the dramatic arts for nine years, appearing in such

sitcoms as *Roc* and *Living Single*. But it wasn't until 1995, when Laurence Fishburne cast him in his off-Broadway play, *Riff Raff*, that the powers-that-be sleeping in Hollywood noticed the overweight lover. His performance earned him a Drama Desk Award nomination—off-Broadway's equivalent of a Tony. He still seems sweetly surprised by the attention, like a C student who makes the honor roll.

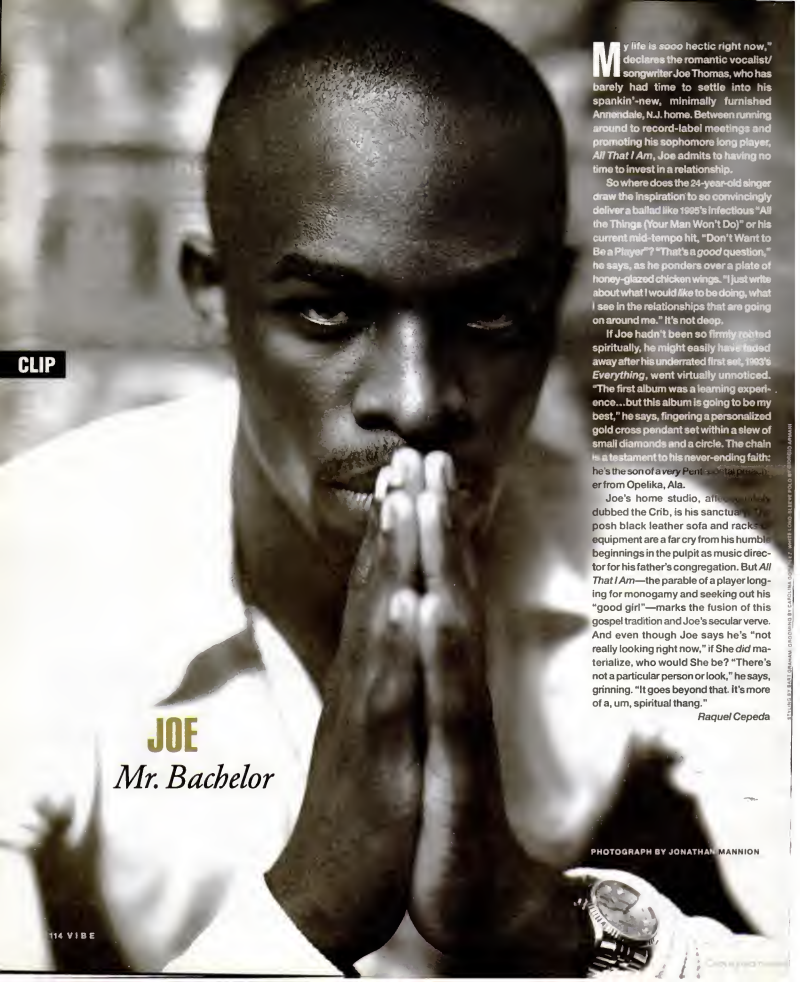
Nineteen ninety-five was a big year for Hev—it was also the year he was asked to take over as CEO of Uptown Records after Andre Harrell left to head Motown. And why not? After all, Andre started out as a rapper too. The difference is that Andre put the mike down to run Uptown; Heavy simply added the extra responsibilities to his plate. The idea of someone running a label, being that label's biggest act, setting up a film production company (called Soul on Soul), and pursuing a full-time acting career seems exhausting; but Heavy D isn't frazzled.

"I don't know how much longer I'll maintain the CEO thing," he says, shrugging his shoulders from behind his neat desk, "but I ain't afraid to say it. It's too corporate, it's not creative enough." Despite the success of Uptown artists Monifah and Soul for Real, Heavy says this executive lifestyle might suit him better later on in life. "My ego let me do it, really," he admits. "I had I thought it out, I'd know better. But my ego was, like, *Shit*, Heavy D and the CEO? Can you beat that?"

Please don't think that Heavy is sitting in his unassuming little office agonizing over things gone wrong in his life. But he's got a lot on his mind, including the death of his brother Jerry Myers this past Thanksgiving from a drug overdose. "A lot of deaths surround me," he says. "but I don't dwell on it." Hev's oldest brother, Tony Myers, was shot in the head "because of drugs" in 1992; two years earlier his very best friend and one of the Boyz, Trouble 2-Roy, died in a tragic tour accident. But somehow Hev says focused on how blessed he's been. "I always remember there are people out there who've gone through *way* worse."

Sometimes we gain strength from the things that hurt us the most. And living through life's painful surprises can help us appreciate the good times. That's why Heavy D prefers to keep his music upbeat. It's his way of reminding listeners—and perhaps himself—that life should be fun too. "The money's great," Hev says with a smile, "but to make someone happy? Don't get no better than that." ■

THANG



CLIP

JOE
Mr. Bachelor

My life is sooo hectic right now," declares the romantic vocalist/songwriter Joe Thomas, who has barely had time to settle into his spanking-new, minimally furnished Annendale, N.J. home. Between running around to record-label meetings and promoting his sophomore long player, *All That I Am*, Joe admits to having no time to invest in a relationship.

So where does the 24-year-old singer draw the inspiration to so convincingly deliver a ballad like 1995's infectious "All the Things (Your Man Won't Do)" or his current mid-tempo hit, "Don't Want to Be a Player"? "That's a good question," he says, as he ponders over a plate of honey-glazed chicken wings. "I just write about what I would like to be doing, what I see in the relationships that are going on around me." It's not deep.

If Joe hadn't been so firmly rooted spiritually, he might easily have faded away after his underrated first set, 1993's *Everything*, went virtually unnoticed. "The first album was a learning experience...but this album is going to be my best," he says, fingering a personalized gold cross pendant set within a slew of small diamonds and a circle. The chain is a testament to his never-ending faith: he's the son of a very Pentecostal preacher from Opelika, Ala.

Joe's home studio, affectionately dubbed the Crib, is his sanctuary. The posh black leather sofa and racks of equipment are a far cry from his humble beginnings in the pulpit as music director for his father's congregation. But *All That I Am*—the parable of a player longing for monogamy and seeking out his "good girl"—marks the fusion of this gospel tradition and Joe's secular verve. And even though Joe says he's "not really looking right now," if *She did* materialize, who would *She* be? "There's not a particular person or look," he says, grinning. "It goes beyond that. It's more of a, um, spiritual thang."

Raquel Cepeda

PHOTOGRAPH BY JONATHAN MANNION



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Fresh from a starring role in

butter pecan rican

Jennifer Lopez glides into West Hollywood's Newsroom Cafe at 9:15 a.m. Looking flawlessly feminine in fitted pants, a blouse, and a wraparound cashmere sweater, she sits down to a health-conscious breakfast of blueberry wheat waffles. This is just the first stop in a day packed with interviews and promotional engagements for a gang of new films. In recent months, the Bronx-born Puerto Rican has costarred in the psychological thriller *Blood and Wine* and the action flick *Anaconda*, and turned leading lady in the popular biopic *Selena*.

Ever since her days as a slightly chubby Fly Girl on Fox's *In Living Color*, Lopez's peoples have been watching her hone her acting skills in a variety of big-screen roles. She played a

final seven (three from the open call, four professional actresses) who were selected to screen test.

After getting the part, Lopez found herself in the middle of a controversy with the Spanish press. Some thought the talent search was a publicity stunt and that the film company, Warner Bros., had planned on using a professional actress all along. Others complained that Lopez was wrong for the role because she wasn't a Chicana. Lopez says she was hurt that her "own people" were second-guessing her, but she stayed focused. "I had to do a good job not just for me, but for Selena, her family, her fans, and her legacy. It was a big responsibility, and I took that on

spoiled her), the recently married Boriqua says L.A.'s been good to her. "I know I'm incredibly lucky and just can't help but think there's something besides my talent guiding me. I guess that's just my Catholic upbringing," she says, laughing.

Her good fortune may also have something to do with her look and style. Other Latina actresses are often unfairly passed over for substantial film roles because they're considered too street (Rosie Perez) or too ethnic (Lauren Vélez) by studio execs. Lopez's olive skin, long hair, voluptuous body, and easy sensuality make her a safe choice—

Jennifer Lopez breaks new ground as a Latina in Hollywood. By Mimi Valdés

Mexican American mother in *Mi Familia* (1995), an urban transit cop in *Money Train* (1995), and a sweet-as-pie fifth-grade teacher in *Jack* (1996). In a relatively short time, the butter pecan Rican has gone from Latina hopeful to Hollywood darling, gracing the cover of this year's *Vanity Fair* film issue alongside other such rising stars as Kate Winslet and Claire Danes.

"I've had a career, I swear, like no other actress—Latina or not," says Lopez. "When I think of who I've worked with—Jack Nicholson, Francis Ford Coppola, Sean Penn—I freak out."

Selena, the true story of the 23-year-old Tejano singer killed by an obsessive employee, in 1995, was a special accomplishment for Lopez. "When I started preparing for the audition and really learning about Selena, I really wanted to play her," says Lopez, who shines in the role. Abraham Quintanilla, Selena's father, conducted a nationwide audition to find the perfect person to play his beloved daughter. Out of a field of 22,000, Lopez was among the

without thinking twice."

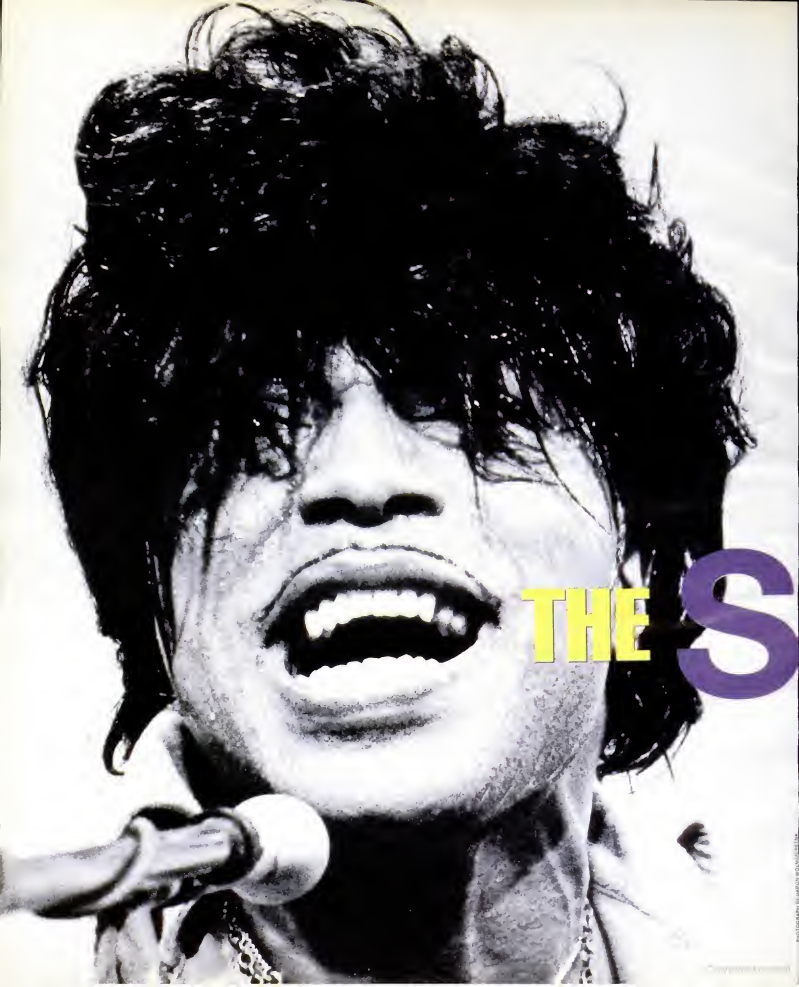
With Selena's family watching Lopez's every move on set, the pressure was on. "I became the focal point of all this pain and suffering, but for some reason, I never broke down," says Lopez. But when she saw the rough cut of the movie, all that changed. "Everyone who had seen it kept telling me how they cried while watching it. So here I am, and it's getting close to the end, and I'm still not crying. All of a sudden they get to this one scene, after Selena passes away, and I just broke down. I was sobbing uncontrollably for about a half hour, forty-five minutes. I needed to cry for her, but I didn't expect such a reaction."

Lopez moved from the Boogie Down to L.A. in 1991 after winning the Fly Girl audition, but never expected to stay. "I always thought I was going back, that was always my attitude," she says. "But some opportunity, some possibility, always kept me out here." Although she'd prefer to live on the East Coast, ideally Miami (Cali weather has

she fits Hollywood's perception of a typical Spanish siren. "Latinas are sexy in general, but I'm not worried about stereotypes," says Lopez. "Sexy is not all that I am."

Now the highest-paid Latina actress in Hollywood (she earned a reported seven figures for *Selena*), Lopez, 26, is on the verge of superstardom. Oliver Stone even rearranged the production schedule of his upcoming film, *U-Turn*, so that Lopez could costar in the noir-ish tale of a femme fatale and a hapless drifter, played by Sean Penn. But unlike other Latina actresses who have made it big while hiding their heritage (think: Rita Hayworth or Raquel Welch), Lopez is and always will be undeniably Latina.

"I'm aware that I'm becoming more known, and I want to set a good example for my people," says Lopez. "Being a role model is okay with me—you have that responsibility when you're in the public eye. That's an attitude Selena had too." □



THE S



CREAM

Little Richard is the alpha and omega of American culture. And he be pretty—very pretty.
By Darius James

Little Richard's eyes are *absolutely radiant*. I'm in the bar of the Sunset Hyatt on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, waiting for Little Richard, and the historical irony is not lost on me. His first hit, "Tutti Frutti," coincided with Rosa Parks's letting the whyte folks know she knew her place on the bus, thus launching the civil rights movement. So "Tutti Frutti" wasn't only one of the first "race records" to cross over to the Top 40, it was a liberating anthem for Eisenhower-era America. Richard's jungle cry "AWOP-BOP-A-LOO-MOP-ALOP-BAM-BOOM!" was the 1950s equivalent of H. Rap Brown's "Burn, baby, burn!"—*emancipatin' booty in all kinda colors!*

But when Little Richard arrives, trailing a royal blue cape—with an entourage of drippy-curled young men who look like extras in a "Let's Not Stop the Violence" rap video—my first thought isn't, It's the Martin Luther King of Rock 'n' Roll; but, rather, That man has got an impressive pair of *peepers*. His eyes blaze with a white-hot underglow and shimmer with startling luminosity. I've never seen anything like them on man, woman, or beast. And that includes the Chi-inflamed eyes of the seventy-something Gung Fu instructor I once saw roll around in a pile of broken glass during Chinese New Year. As I look into Little Richard's eyes, staring deeply into the stained-glass windows of his soul, I see *mania*. It's a mania rooted in the *divine*. The heaven-sent madness of *genies*.

Little Richard takes my hand. His face beams, those eyes flitting to my tie. He exclaims in a sprightly Georgia accent:

"Buckwee was my frien'!" The pattern on my tie is a collage of the famed *Our Gang* ragamuffin. "You got my frien' on you!"

"Lil' popcorn eater," he mutters in reverie. "Usta eat up *all th'* popcorn!"

You knew Buckwheat, huh?

"I knew them all," he replies. "I knew Buckwee an'

Charlie Parker an'..." (That, gentle reader, is a magic Kodak moment. Never again in life will you read a sentence linking these two in complete, bald-faced seriousness. Think about it.)

Little Richard cocks a suspicious eyebrow. "Haven't I seen you someplace before?"

Yeah, I confess. The Norwalk Oyster Festival. I was the rabble-rouser shouting at the promoters.

"Oooo, buddy!" he rolls his eyes. "I been tryin' to forget that one."

What Little Richard is trying to forget is a rainy night last summer when Connecticut residents gathered to tramp through a field of ankle-deep mud, slurp tumors-on-the-half-shell, and see the King of Rock 'n' Roll for a



THAT'S NO BULL

Little Richard is utterly amazing—like the redwood forests or the Rocky Mountains, the best of what America has to offer.

measly five bucks. Little Richard showed up with a full band, his traveling ministry, and a pair of hiney-shakin' young boys in spandex leotards. Homeboy was ready to turn those yokels out!

Amid clamorous applause, he stepped onto the rain-swept bandstand, sat at his baby grand, and began to play. But instead of delivering the sound of the legendary rock 'n' roll juggernaut, the PA squawked and crackled, and all anyone could hear was the faint tinkle of breaking glass.

I got hot. I paid \$5 to get up in that muthafucka! And besides, if that fat slobbering drug addict—that *pretender* to the crown Elvis—were still alive, ain't no way in the world

they'd supply him with a cheap sound system. So I stood up and started screaming: *This is a disgrace!* If it weren't for Little Richard you would have no "culture" in America! Y'all'd still be jitterbuggin' in 'coon coats to Rudy Vallee's megaphone! Free Little Richard!

The crowd was unnerved. Little Richard looked up from his keyboard and glared out into the audience, zeroing in on me with those high-beam eyes. His expression read: "*Who is that knotty-headed fool makin' all that racket?!*"

Fortunately, the sound guy got it together. And, trouper that he is, Little Richard went on with the show, managing, at one point, to hop on top of the piano, as he often did in his young lion days. But at 63, with a

bum leg caused by a car accident, he had to be helped down by a stagehand. The man wore the crowd down, makin' 'em beg for more with his blustery, barrelhouse-blues style; in fact, you didn't want to listen to his band, you wanted to hear him pump that piano and sing. And he didn't need the two boys poppin' their buttocks either, 'cause, well, Little Richard is *pretty*.

The Little Richard I encounter in the hotel bar is not the preening narcissist known for his outrageous looks and wicked bons mots. Instead, I meet the Reverend Richard Penniman, Rock 'n' Roller, the evangelical Little Richard who believes that "God is the all

***IT WORKS
EVERY TIME.***





With his former understudy, early 1960s

and all, a cloud by day and a fire by night."

In 1957 Little Richard saw a sign. As the newly launched *Spumik* beeped above Sydney's municipal arena, Richard cut short his two-week Australian tour. "This is it," he declared. "I am through. I am leaving showbiz to go back to God." His reasons for dropping out at the pinnacle of his career were both spiritual and earthly. He said his label, Specialty Records, wanted to "buy me body and soul—with my own money." By 1959 he'd enrolled in Huntsville, Ala.'s Oakwood College to study to become an ordained elder of the church.

"The dollar is not the bottom line in my life," he says today. "I've never made the money that a lot of people have made through my stuff. But I have a joy they will never get. I have a contentment they can't buy.... You can't have it all, but you can have some. I like what I just said. Isn't that beautiful?"

Little Richard was born Richard Wayne Penniman on December 5, 1932 in the Pleasant Hill section of Macon, Ga., the third of 12 children. His mother, Leva Mae, actually named him Ricardo, but whoever filled out his birth certificate thought she was speaking "Ebonics" and translated his name back into English.

"The word 'poor' really don't apply to how I came up," he says. "Po' is the word fo' us. I remember my mother used to cook breakfast. I would go in the kitchen, gettin' ready to go to school, an' I would take the grease out of the pan an' pour it on grits. We wouldn't have no butter, so we used grease. Nobody complained: We was used to it."

"I was the one in my family they told wasn't going to be anything. I used to say to my mother, I'm gonna be famous. An' she didn't understand it. She said 'Boy, git on out of here!' But one thing my mother did do for me, she made me study piano lessons." There was a good reason why his mother made him study too. "I would play piano with my mouth," he reveals. "Cause I didn't have no piano. My grandfather had one, but he wouldn't give it to me till I was almos' grown. He was one of those folks who wanted to keep everything. Now that I got old, I do the same thing—papers an'

everything all up in my room."

Little Richard bursts into laughter. His laughter reveals a silly but very loving man. And a man who's seen his share of tragedy. "My best friend killed my dad," he informs me, the pain still evident in his voice after all these years. "Blew my daddy away in our front yard. Here's a boy my daddy fed, gave nickels an' dimes an' quarters an' fifty cents to. My daddy had a lil' nightclub called the Tip Inn. An' this boy—my dad caught him stealin' out of a peanut vendor. An' he blew my daddy away!"

He says he first became aware of God's presence as a little boy. "People would come to me for prayer," he says. "My mother thought they was crazy.... I would pray for the sick; I would pray for them that God would bless and open ways for them to lift their burdens."

Along with God, his constant companion was music. "Sometimes we be all singin'. My mother be out in the backyard washin' clothes with a washboard. You see Mr. Willie over there singin'. You hear my mama over there. An' you hear Miss Bessy there. It be a big choir. The whole neighborhood singin'."

Little Richard's SCREAM can be heard in James Brown, Paul McCartney, the Glyph, and even in the orgasmic guitar screech of Jimi Hendrix, who used to play in Richard's band.

"There was a guy there we called Cuzzin' Buddy," he confides, "—you know, everybody was ya' cuzzin'. He used to walk down the streets in the evenin' playin' git'tar, down the middle of the street jus' like he onstage. I wouldn't sit on the porch like the other people. I'd run right wit' 'im. He'd say, 'Boy, git out the way,' but I'd be right there 'cause that's what I wanted to be."

More than any other person, Little Richard says Brother Joe May inspired him to become what he is today. "Brother Joe May sounded like Mahalia Jackson. He was out of East St. Louis, Ill. They called him the Thunderbolt of the Middle West. He didn't need no microphone. You could hear him twenty blocks down the street. I usta hear that man sing, an' 'chills be goin' down my spine."

In the heat of the moment, Little Richard is moved to sing a song made famous by Brother Joe May. Unfortunately, the printed page cannot convey the sincerity, special beauty, or simple sweetness in his voice. When he finishes, Little Richard shows the kind of excitement children reserve solely for Christmas morning.

"There was so much feelin'!" he exclaims. "I would jus' have to get up out of my seat, 'cause I would feel it all over my body! When he got through with a show, if you had a burden, it was gone. If you had a pressure, it was lifted. If you was depressed an' distressed, it was out. It was upliftin'. It was very, very gratifyin'. It was—oh my God—*inspirin'!*"

Another crucial influence was gospel singer Marian Williams, whom he credits as the source of that "high holler" in his voice—the signature scream that has electrified the world for nearly half a century. And I'm compelled to ask what his scream means.

"It's a scream like you been whipped," he answers. "One of the screams I give is different from the other screams. The scream that I scream just before the saxophone player takes a solo is a scream of excitement; but the other holler I give is not. It's almost like a whistle. It's a lonely sound. It's a sound like you need someone; you need help. You need...." He looks me in the eye and giggles. "You in need, really—and you hollerin' for it."

In the fall of 1986, the year Little Richard was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, I had a gentleman's disagreement with Black Rock Coalition cofounder Vernon Reid (who told me if I repeated this tale he would "beat my butt." My drawers are down, Vernon). I insisted Little Richard was the alpha and omega of rock 'n' roll, its beginning and its end. Vernon said no, it was James Brown. Absolutely everybody steals from Little Richard, I countered, from Michael Jackson to the Rolling Stones. No, Vernon insisted, it was James Brown.

Since Vernon's reasons corresponded to the finer points of music theory and my own were rooted in cultural history, we batted back and forth with no resolution. I didn't change Vernon's mind. And my thinking, too, remained the same: Little Richard is a national treasure, like the redwood forests or the Rocky Mountains, the perfect cultural symbol of the best of what America has to offer.

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Little Richard entered show business in his teens. He first appeared with Dr. Hudson's Medicine Show, followed by B. Brown and his Orchestra, and a minstrel show called Sugarfoot Sam From Alabama, in which he first performed in a dress. "I was the biggest mess you ever saw!" he says in the Charles White bio *The Life and Times of Little Richard*, a book he's not pleased with because he feels it sensationalizes certain aspects of his life and doesn't present

Specialty Records' A&R man Bumps Blackwell—the man who mentored Ray Charles and Quincy Jones—Little Richard left for L.A. His abrupt departure left his band with a number of dates booked and no singer. *So who ya gonna call?* Richard's manager, Clint Brantley, remembered a singer/dancer who crashed a gig in South Carolina. Brantley tracked him down and discovered that he was an ex-jailbird who had been busted for theft and "general delinquency."



At the 1997 American Music Awards, shortly before receiving his long-overdue Award of Merit.

solid arguments for his place as rock 'n' roll's "inventor, liberator, and founding architect."

In truth, he underestimates his own importance. Little Richard's personal and professional career encompass the sum total of popular American entertainment. His minstrel-show beginnings place him at the epicenter of the genesis of American culture. The minstrel show was America's first successful form of popular entertainment—a form that evolved into vaudeville, radio, movies, and television. Once you understand that, you realize that Little Richard is a living history of much more than just rock 'n' roll.

You can take his singing voice, for example, and trace the sound back to the plantation slave's field holler, through the blues, spirituals, and gospel to urban sounds like R&B and jazz. All culminating in his signature shriek—a profoundly liberating influence on modern pop music. His scream can be heard in the work of performers as diverse as JB, Paul McCartney, Janis Joplin, the Glyph Who Was Once a Slave to the Evil Time Warner Empire—even in the orgasmic guitar screech of Jimi Hendrix, who used to play in Richard's band. Little Richard's scream is the expression of primal emotions with the power to drive crowds into a Dionysian frenzy. His voice is the true voice of America. He sings for all of us.

Four years after our conversation, I was watching Vernon's band, Living Colour, on *The Arsenio Hall Show*. As the song "Elvis Is Dead" climaxed, who trotted out from the wings as rock's true king? Was it James Brown? No. It was Little Richard.

I could only assume Vernon had finally seen the light. Perhaps he'd discovered this obscure Little Richard fact: In 1955, after recording "Tutti Frutti" for

Brantley pulled some strings with the singer's parole officer and put him on the road with the band, billed as "Little Richard." The singer's name? James Brown.

Throughout our interview, at odd moments, the skin on Little Richard's face tightens like the head of a drum, his eyes harden, and his attention is redirected toward another part of the barroom. He throws these strange hand signals, fingers flipping every which way. It's some wild, pinwheeling-eyeball-Svengali-controlling-his-zombie-minions-type shit. And it's buggin' me right the fuck out. So I have to ask what the hell that crazy shit is he's doing.

He says he's signaling the waiter because the coffee is cold. I don't buy this story. But what the hell—the man conducts music. Maybe he likes to control the people in his life the same way he manipulates musicians onstage. So I ask him if he treats the members of his band the same way.

"I just look at them," he answers, "and they know. It's an embarrassing thing onstage to be the one to make a mistake. I give them hand signals. Nothing I do is timed. It's not like Prince or Michael Jackson or Bruce Springsteen—everything they do is correct. The way I do it is not the correct way it's written on paper. My band knows they have to watch me at all times because I have no set time. They never know when I'm going to stop. They don't know what I'm going to sing. I don't tell them what the next song is."

Why do you do that to your band?

Little Richard looks surprised, then laughs. "It's better for them to not know, an 'I jus' sing an' they follow me. By me leading with the piano, it puts me in control. Everything I sing is led by the piano—everything."

His past relationships with bands offer some insight into the severity of his approach. "When I recorded in New Orleans," he says, "me and Fats Domino recorded with the same band: Lee Allen, Earl Palmer, Red Tyler, and Bumps Blackwell producing me for Specialty Records. Bands didn't want to play with me," he adds. "They had never heard nothin' like that. They were ashamed to go onstage with me because nobody was gonna applaud. You out there sayin' 'Awop-Bop-A-Loop-Do,' everybody look at you like you stupid." He mimes a disgruntled musician with a pained expres-

sion: "You out th' jungle or somethin'?"

"But the vibration of my generation was different," he explains. "We didn't want what our parents had—the lowdown blues of sufferin'. They was depressed and distressed. Nothin' but blues. I was runnin' from that 'I woke up this mornin' an' my baby was gone.' I wanted my baby here. I didn't wanna tell nobody about the trouble I saw. I wanted a celebration."

In preparation for this interview, Little Richard's manager and publicist, Gloria Boyce, alerted me to two subjects that I should handle with discretion. The first was the Charles White biography; the second was a certain rival performer.

"I can't think of his name offhand," Ms. Boyce says, "but he stole his whole act from Little Richard."

I hazard a guess. Esquerita?

She answers like she's just fingered a suspect in a police lineup. "Yeah, that's him."

Esquerita, a.k.a. S.Q. Reeder, a.k.a. the Magnificent Mark Milochi, was an early rock 'n' roll freckateer. With his pompadour and rhinestone shades, standing at a good seven feet in his patent-leather Cuban stomps, Esquerita was one imposing drag king. He began as a church pianist—according to one published source, Esquerita was an organist with, uh-hum, *Brother Joe May*—and became one of the legendary unsung figures of rock 'n' roll. Little Richard once called Esquerita, who died of AIDS-related complications on October 23, 1986, "one of the greatest pianists." And that included "Jerry Lee Lewis, Stevie Wonder, or anybody I've ever heard. I learned a whole lot about phrasing from him. He really taught me a lot."

Given the religious convictions of the honorable Reverend Richard Penniman—who once repudiated the bisexual past of Little Richard by saying "God put Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve, in the Garden of Eden"—it's not surprising that he wants to protect the mainstream acceptance he once sacrificed for his love of God and has only recently regained. To approach the history of "a rock star that dare not speak its name" was to open a can of worms.

The key to that history was a New Orleans club called the Dew Drop Inn, known as much for its "Baby Doll" acts as for its featuring the nation's leading R&B headliners. It was also the club where Bumps Blackwell first heard Little Richard play "Tutti Frutti," which, in its original form, was quite risqué. A history of the acts appearing at the Dew Drop would shed a great deal of light on the androgynous personae of rock 'n' roll, and account for figures such as the Glyph, David Bowie, the New York Dolls, the Cycle Sluts, and, of course, RuPaul. But when I ask Little Richard about the *original* "Tutti Frutti," alluding to the facts I've just mentioned, he stares at me in sustained silence. His eyes narrow and smolder for a very long time. Finally, he speaks.

"We was young kids full of devilment," he says. "That was what of 'people used to say: 'devilish.' I never did sing it for the public that much. I used to be real bashful back in that time. I couldn't look at nobody an' talk about it like I'm talkin' to you now. I was real, real, real shy. It's strange to say it, to see me now."

He would have been frightening had he not such beautiful eyes. □



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*PAPA'S GOT A BRAND NEW BAG™

A woman with dark hair and sunglasses perched on her head is sitting on the edge of a swimming pool. She is wearing a black one-strap swimsuit with a white horizontal band across the midsection. The background shows a pool, palm trees, and a building under bright, warm lighting.

VIBESTYLE

Left: Navy swimsuit with one strap by Mossimo Swim; black Butterfly sunglasses by Isaac Mizrahi.

Opposite: Black cutaway bikini by Todd Oldham; multicolored bangles by Calin for Showroom 126; black mules by Stephan Kellan; black wave lycra trunk by F&S; slides by Nike; watch by GUESS

WEST HOLLYWOOD, Calif.: This season's designer swimsuits are so chic and sexy, you

may not want to get into the water. Photographs by Jamil G.S. Styling by Emil Wilbekin



Love Pool



Silver aviator sunglasses
by Ray-Ban; orange towel
by Moschino



Black string bikini and
mesh T-shirt sold as a set
by GUESS Swimwear

Black bikini with
silver studs by
Moschino; black
lace-up mules by
Patrick Cox; white
swim trunks with
stripes by DKNY;
silver aviator sun-
glasses by Ray-Ban;
watch by Rolex





VIBEFASHION

NEW WAVE

LA JOLLA, Calif.:

Surf's up this summer,

and California-based

sportswear designers are

making a big splash

on the beach and on the

streets. *Photographs by*

Robert Paul Maxwell.

Styling by Emil Wilbekin

Wetsuit by
Quiksilver, slides by
Airwalk

from top left: White cotton quilted jacket by Universal; navy boardshort by Verso; gray leather Chevrolet shirt by J.C. Cassini; black quilted white plaid by Guess; orange and yellow cotton T-shirt by Outer white zip-up with stripes by Vento; white canvas shoes by Vento; white cable-knit tank top by GQ; black plaid parka with white plaid by GUESS; Swimwear black and white warm-up pants by Verso; white terry with pullover by GUESS; orange boardshort with white tie by GUESS; Swimwear yellow Freestyle Engineered ship's vest top by Quiksilver; blue shorts by Ocean Pacific; boots by Aussie Dogs; orange plaid shirt by BC Ethnic Femme; orange hooded anorak by DKNY Kids; white boardshort with orange stripes by F&B; blue T-shirt by GQ Design; black boardshort by Verso



Navy halter two-piece
bikini by Mossimo
Swim, slides by Vans;
red/white/blue bikini
with bandeau top by
tommy by Tommy
Hilfiger, slides by Vans

Khaki zipfront top
by Level 7





Orange terry
cloth top by
Mossimo, white
corduroy
short by GUESS,
sunglasses by
Killer Loop

Light-green tank
by CG Design,
white short with
reflective waist-
band by Verso;
khaki cotton
cargo short by
Unionbay, sport-
watch by GUESS



STYLE FILE

DESIGNER FASHION

COMPARED TO FASHION DESIGNER, AND FASHION, THE BEST IS A MAN

SCOOP

Coco Chanel once advised that to avoid looking like a fashion victim, you should get totally dressed and then take off one accessory before you leave the house. Well, Coco clearly didn't anticipate the wide array of cool designer sunglasses, bags, and shoes that are

currently flooding the market. Here's what to look for this season. The eyes have it for summer (as you can see on this page) with hot new shades by the likes of Gucci, Polo Sport, Isaac Mizrahi, Alain Mikli, Fila, Mossimo, Ray-Ban, Killer Loop, Web, Kenneth Cole, Gianfranco Ferré, and Christian Dior. In the bag department, B.C. Elltic, Diesel, Maurice Malone, Verso, Mossimo, Eckō Unlimited, Phat Farm, Avirex, Joe Boxer, and Perry Ellis America have all created bright, graphically designed totes, from back packs to travel models. You can be fast (and fashionable) on your feet with new all-purpose footwear from Tommy Hilfiger, DKNY, Karl Kani, Perry Ellis America, Jico, and GUESS. All of these accessories will add flavor and personal style to your wardrobe—just don't forget Coco's advice.

SHADES

Here are VIBE's Top 10 sunglasses (including Ray-Ban, below) for summer '97. They're as diverse in price as they are in design, but surely there's a pair that fits you.



10 Kenneth Cole, \$50



9 Web, \$220



8 Isaac Mizrahi, \$165



7 Christian Dior, \$138



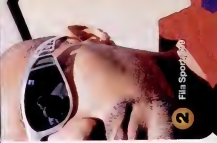
6 Alain Mikli, \$200



4 Polo Sport, \$65



3 Diesel America, \$210



2 Fila Sport, \$90



1 RAY-BAN

In the upcoming movie *Men in Black III*, Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones survive alien laser attack thanks to their trusty Ray-Ban Predator 2 sunglasses.

It's not the first time Ray-Ban has been featured in Hollywood blockbuster: remember *Risky Business* and *The Blues Brothers*? The difference this time, though, is that the

Predator 2 glasses aren't represent the new and modernized look of the eyewear company, which began making Aviator sunglasses 60 years ago for the U.S. Air Corps.

Those classic Aviator and Wayfarer lenses can still be purchased at Sun Glass Huts nationwide or at the Ray-Ban flagship store in Atlanta's Underground, along with the new Daddy-O and Sleazestreet Tanker styles. As for the Predator 2, we bet it will take off like its big-screen predecessors.

STYLE
FILE

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALBERT WATSON

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..... ☐ YES ☐ NO
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..... ☐ YES ☐ NO
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VIBE ARTS SUMMER FILM GUIDE VIBE ARTS SUMMER FILM GUIDE

Verica A. Fox and Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Batman and Robin*

keeping it reel

VIBE peeps the summer's good, bad, and ugly big-budget flicks. *By Gary Dauphin*

The summer has always been a lull in Hollywood—three-plus months from late May to early September during which studios pull out their big guns in hopes of scoring big, but with production costs in one or two fell-box-office swamps. Action, adventure, sci-fi, and thrillers abound, and although summer has only two or three of the year's contenders, it's a seasonal date movie sneaks in between the big ones, just in case anyone out there is tired of summering in the theater.

This summer, the studio is not only likely to peak, but, as entrenched among larger audiences for way buddy/cop flicks like *Lethal Weapon* or *Baywatch*, it's expected to be just about everywhere, releasing a major space-based entry, saturating the market with hugely expensive fare, the likes of which it hasn't done in the time on toy store shelves, in video game consoles, and on special edition, fast-food super-size cups.

Some call it Land valuations. Others that it's a mostly unpolished industry (the average price tag of a Hollywood movie passed the \$100 million mark in 2001) could squawk, "market is not ready to move." And development lags. But besides missing the point that Hollywood has always priced genuine risk takers, that's also the reason to do more work in the "pre-launch" Summer, after all is above the big ride.

With that in mind, here's a wrap-up approach to the week's coming attractions, complete with most recent box office potential ratings, and our own psychic forecast!

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[1] *The Fifth Element*, May 9

(Columbia Pictures)
Starring: Bruce Willis, Gary Oldman, Ian Holm, Milla Jovovich
Director: Luc Besson

Fast Pitch: *Blade Runner* meets *Twelve Monkeys*

Buzz: Columbia is trying to make *Fifth Element* one of the most talked about movies of the summer by... not talking about it. To keep details of the film secret, the press was banned from the set, cast and crew were allowed to see the script only one page at a time, and it's rumored several endings were shot.

Evil Eye: Director and cast have a great track record, but in a summer already chock-full of sci-fi fare, the cloak-and-dagger stuff could turn out to be much ado about nothing. **Psychic Forecast:** Even without

has reportedly decided to make this one slightly less family oriented. **Evil Eye:** Yet another season of endless product tie-ins and dinosaur-size marketing may make hype-weary critics wish this movie was extinct.

Psychic Forecast: If you make each finger count for, say, \$75 million, you might be able to track *Lost World's* box-office take with one hand.

[3] *Con Air*, June 6

(Touchstone Pictures)
Starring: Nicolas Cage, John Cusack, John Malkovich, Ving Rhames, Steve Buscemi, Mykelti Williamson

Director: Simon West

Fast Pitch: *Turbulence* meets *The Rock*

Buzz: Think of this *mano a mano*

Director: Jan De Bont

Fast Pitch: *Speed* meets *Juggernaut* (1994)

Buzz: Keanu Reeves almost scuttled this ocean-liner-with-bomb flick when he bailed out on the *Speed* franchise (and a reported \$9 million paycheck) in order to tour with his horrible all-rock band, Dogstar.

Evil Eye: The chemistry between Reeves and Bullock was about 50 percent of the earlier film's charm, which starts *Speed 2* off a little slow; *Patric + Bullock* doesn't spell sexy.

Psychic Forecast: America seems to like "It Girl" Bullock best when she's in large-scale danger; so expect *Speed 2* to do well without breaking any records or doing any further damage to anyone's career.

for a long afterlife on video.

[5] *Batman and Robin*, June 20

(Warner Bros.)
Starring: George Clooney, Chris O'Donnell, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Alicia Silverstone, Uma Thurman, Vivica A. Fox

Director: Joel Schumacher

Fast Pitch: *Batman* (the movie) meets *Batman* (the TV series)

Buzz: Val Kilmer may have ditched the cape for a halo in order to make *The Saint* (thereby opening up the Batcave to *ER's* George Clooney), but this franchise has shown an ability to survive abrupt lead changes. The all-star cast and monumentally campy set design reportedly pushed this film's cost over the \$70 million mark.

Buzz: This action-thriller in which an FBI agent and terrorist exchange faces and places should cement Hong Kong expatriate John Woo as a Hollywood player. The script's original sci-fi bent—the bad guy was to be in cryogenic freeze at first—has reportedly been downsized in favor of *Blade*-style hijinks.

Evil Eye: Do audiences really like the new John Travolta, or are they just pleasantly surprised that he's not dead yet? Perhaps we'll find out with *Face/Off*.

Psychic Forecast: John Woo is as close to God as any action fan will get in this lifetime. Expect between 40 and 60 million amens.

[8] *Men in Black*, July 2

(Columbia Pictures)
Starring: Will Smith, Tommy Lee



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total domination at the box office, Bruce Willis's recent transformation from action Everyman to hipster Everyman should be complete with this film.

[2] *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, May 24 (Universal)

Starring: Jeff Goldblum, Julianne Moore, Vince Vaughn
Director: Steven Spielberg

Fast Pitch: *Jurassic Park 2* (or, as the tag line puts it, "Something has survived...")

Buzz: The sequel to the highest single-release domestic grosser in history (more than \$250 million) is reportedly scarier than the original, with legendary effectsmeister Stan Winston and his team producing loads of prehistoric badness that's more teeth than bellow. Spielberg

actions as the last battle between '80s testosterone-driven blockbusters and the digital moviemaking of the future. Director West filmed the real-life demolition of the historic Sands Casino in Las Vegas for the explosive climax.

Evil Eye: Too many crazy criminals, too little script? *Con Air* could easily become a weird *WWF*-style farce if director West isn't careful.

Psychic Forecast: Big names and the sheer bulk of the cast should ensure respectable returns, and it could bring John Cusack back from the living dead.

[4] *Speed 2: Cruise Control*, June 6 (Fox)

Starring: Sandra Bullock, Jason Patric, Willem Dafoe, Glenn Plummer

[6] *Boogie Nights*, June 13

(New Line)
Starring: Mark Wahlberg, Julianne Moore, Burt Reynolds, Don Cheadle

Director: Paul Thomas Anderson

Fast Pitch: *The People vs. Larry Flynt* meets *Saturday Night Fever*

Buzz: A low- to mid-budget oddity about the hardcore porn universe of the '70s, *Boogie Nights* could turn out to be the gloriously soundtrack-led ode to the disco era that Hollywood keeps promising. Expect Marky Mark Wahlberg to take the pant-removing gimmick that made him famous the first time around to its logical conclusion.

Evil Eye: Paul Thomas Anderson who? Markey what?

Psychic Forecast: Potential indie sleeper with stronger possibilities

Evil Eye: It's been said that poor Alicia Silverstone still looks a little chunky in that *Batgirl* costume of hers, despite numerous diets. People who love the Dark Knight-style *Batman* are likely to lament Schumacher's cartoonish take on the franchise, which only worked last time because Jim Carrey was on board.

Psychic Forecast: *Batman and Robin* will be one of the season's Top 3 blockbusters, and will have teenage boys slapping Vivica Fox posters up on their bedroom walls.

[7] *Face/Off*, July 2 (Paramount)

Starring: John Travolta, Nicolas Cage

Director: John Woo

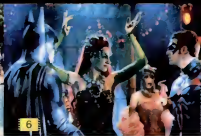
Fast Pitch: *The Killer* meets *Desperately Seeking Susan*

Jones, Linda Fiorentino
Director: Barry Sonnenfeld

Fast Pitch: *X-Files* meets *101* meets *The Blues Brothers*

Buzz: Based on the *Malibu Comic* by Lowell Cunningham, *Men in Black* hopes to trade in on a number of trends, from conspiracy theories to alien invasion to the old black/white action/comedy cop... blah, blah, blah. *MIB's* digital effects (from the team behind *Twister*) are said to include a headquaters where men in black casually walk on walls and an alien spaceship terminal that should put to rest all those misplaced ooohs and ahhs for *Star Wars's* revamped "Creature Cantina" sequence.

Evil Eye: The most complicated special effect Sonnenfeld has ever handled was "tit" from *The Addams*



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Family. Can he make the leap to all-out (albeit official) big-screen war against alien terrorists?

Psychic Forecast: No *Id4* here, but if Will Smith really is a superstar (and we think he is), he's due for another big box office pop. Expect *M8* to surface cruise into the year's Top 5.

[4] Air Force One, July 25 (Columbia Pictures)
Starring: Harrison Ford, Glenn Close, Gary Oldman
Director: Wolfgang Petersen
Fast Pitch: Patriot Games meets Executive Decision
Buzz: Ford gets to save the free world from nuclear devastation while fighting his way through a full-scale mock-up of the little plane—something we'd like to see Billy Clinton try someday.

ambiguous (and noncommercial) roles that every good actor wants between moneymakers.

Evil Eye: Jackson is loved by audiences, but they haven't shown up yet for his starring roles.

Psychic Forecast: If audiences connect with this high school confidence (with a violent spin), it could break even, with critical kudos for Jackson.

[11] How to Be a Player, August 8 (Gramercy)
Starring: Bill Bellamy, Mark Voorhies, Bill Morrow
Director: Lionel C. Martin
Fast Pitch: *A Thin Line Between Love and Hate* meets *First Wives Club*
Buzz: *How to Be a Player* takes on the familiar hip hop comedy theme of the re-education of an inveterate

Hopper, Laura Linney
Director: Peter Weir
Fast Pitch: *The Cable Guy* meets *The Razor's Edge*

Buzz: Jim Carrey's off-delayed semi-dramatic turn as an average Joe whose life becomes the subject of a prime-time hit. Weir is a respected international auteur who's never had a real Hollywood megahit, and although Carrey's had his share, *The Truman Show* is a chance to remind audiences of how much of what he does involves actual acting.

Evil Eye: The poor reception Carrey got for *The Cable Guy* (his last attempt to step out of character) makes this a dubious choice of summer gigs. No one really wants to see Carrey do the serious stuff, and if he keeps forcing it on audiences, they might be annoyed enough to stay

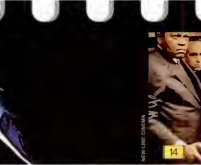
that doesn't look like a superhero flick (e.g. the costumes won't annoy and the battles against archvillain Violator won't seem like bad Wire-Fu).

Evil Eye: Superheroes almost always look better on the page than on the screen (and if you don't believe us, we have an old videotape of Captain America).
Psychic Forecast: New Line has always known how to make good genre films work on a low budget (everything from *Mortal Kombat* to *Scream*). Count on handsome receipts, lots of merchandising, and at least three sequels.

[11] Hoodlum, August 29 (MGM/UA)
Starring: Laurence Fishburne, Tim Roth, Andy Garcia, Vanessa Williams

race, *Hoodlum* won't have much competition, but the Labor Day weekend release will force folks to choose between period gangster stylings, a trip to the beach, and that last lazy-day barbecue.

[11] Aliens: Resurrection, September (Fox)
Starring: Sigourney Weaver, Winona Ryder
Director: Jean-Pierre Jeunet
Fast Pitch: *Aliens* meets *Species* meets *Blade Runner*
Buzz: Sigourney Weaver had sworn several years ago never to do another *Alien* movie, but money (\$11 million worth) apparently talks. Set several hundred years after the end of *Aliens 3*, *Resurrection* has the kind of genetic engineering premise (Ripley comes back as a clone) that



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Evil Eye: Every summer throughout the '90s has made room for a Ford flick. By now, his thinking man's action moves are beginning to look more crutchie than trademark.
Psychic Forecast: Expect long lines at the box office, tighter Presidential security, and a write-in campaign for Ford in the year 2000.

[10] 187, July 30 (Warner Bros.)
Starring: Samuel Jackson, Kelly Rowland, John Heard
Director: Kevin Reynolds
Fast Pitch: *Blackboard Jungle* meets *Death Wish*
Buzz: Reynolds wants to erase the stigma of having directed the '90s *Heaven's Gate* with a small, tight psychological thriller about a battle-scarred L.A. high school teacher. Jackson gets one of those morally

dog. One would have thought this turf was already well trod; but if the recent success of *Boyz n the City* has anything, it's that there's probably still life in the old curvet. Also, Bill Bellamy gets a chance to star after a pretty good turn in *Love Jones*.

Evil Eye: Memo to Bill B.: Many a young black comedian's movie career has been severely damaged by an awful romantic comedy. You'll get work alright (just ask any Wayans); but in this business, only Eddie Murphy gets a second chance.
Psychic Forecast: A modest budget makes even modest returns look good; but that's only if the soundtrack is, in Hollywood speak, sleazebag.

[11] The Truman Show, August 8 (Paramount)
Starring: Jim Carrey, Dennis

away from his more traditional fare.
Psychic Forecast: Carrey has the look and juice to survive another so-so outing like *The Cable Guy*, so long as it brings him some more critical respect.

[10] Spawn, August 22 (New Line)
Starring: Michael Jai White, John Leguizamo
Director: Mark Dippe
Fast Pitch: It's the Spawn, and if you have to ask...
Buzz: Wesley Snipes has been making noise for years about bringing a black superhero to the screen, but New Line and first-time director Dippe have beaten him to the punch with this version of Todd McFarlane's big seller, *The Spawn*. The folks at Industrial Light + Magic are promising a superhero flick

Director: Bill Duke
Fast Pitch: *The Untouchables* meets *Black Caesar*
Buzz: Bill Duke's long-delayed, big-budget Prohibition-era gangster epic promises plenty of mafioso scenery chewing from the male leads. This predominantly true-to-life tale about the 1930s black numbers runner and pimp Ellsworth "Bumpy" Johnson recasts the lead as a do-for-self Marcus Garveyite, which could play in interesting ways in '97.

Evil Eye: The Robin Hood genre of black crime movies has gone a little stale since the '70s, which may be one reason why this movie's been pushed back more times than the *Rakim* solo album.
Psychic Forecast: By opening near the end of the summer box-office

fans either flock to or complain about hysterically on the Information Superhighway. Director Jeunet (*City of Lost Children*, *Delicatessen*) has a thing for baroque and complicated visuals that promise to make *Resurrection* incredible to look at if nothing else.

Evil Eye: We can always count on Sigourney; but can Winona Ryder, as a cyborg assassin, kill, kill, kill? **Psychic Forecast:** In the wake of all the clubby, locker-room machismo this summer, *Resurrection's* nearly all-girl cast (Weaver, Ryder, Alien Queen Embryo) is sure to make a big box-office dent. Expect the film to revive the *Alien* franchise; another comic book, a gory *Son of PlayStation* game, and a sequel just in time for the next millennium. ☐

movies

dr. snakeskin's HOME VIDEO VIEWS

trailer-park princess busts a move

In his directorial debut *Freeway*, Matthew Bright moves the Brothers Grimm into a white-trash trailer park, shoves a crack pipe in their mouths, and gives us a dark and caustic

retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood*. Examining gender, race, and class privilege in ways rarely attempted in commercial film, *Freeway* subverts the movie convention of "woman as victim" by giving the viewer a take-no-prisoners teen heroine.

With a Danny Elfman score reminiscent of his Oingo Boingo-styled soundtrack for *Forbidden Zone*, *Freeway* opens with Vanessa Lutz (Reese Witherspoon), a white welfare teen with an indented forehead, struggling

through a monosyllabic sentence written on a schoolhouse chalkboard. Vanessa, who has a buff black boyfriend (Bokeem Woodbine), lives in a cheap motel with her crack ho' mother (Amanda Plummer) and an ex-con stepfather (Michael T. Weiss) who's trying to get into her jailbait drawers.

Unfortunately, Vanessa's warm and loving family unit soon falls apart. The cops bust her mom for soliciting and possession, and it's back to Children's Services for Vanessa. She, however, has other plans. When the social worker shows up to take her away, Vanessa handcuffs her to the bed. And it's off to grandma's house she goes.

On the way, her car burns out on Interstate 5. Along comes Bob Wolverton (Kiefer Sutherland), a teen psychologist who also happens to be the "I-5 serial killer." When big bad Wolverton attempts to leave her raped and mutilated by the roadside, Vanessa turns the tables like Pam Grier and puts a serious whoopin' on that ass. But later, when Wolverton recovers, with a colostomy bag dangling from his hip, it's Vanessa who's put on trial and not him.

Mr. Bright's sly, socially insightful film about the American underclass horrified audiences at Sundance in 1996 and had a short-lived general release, but it became a midnight cult fave in San Francisco art houses. Now that it's available on video (through Republic Pictures), you can order up a bucket of Kentucky Fried and get your lips greasy with one of the best Hollywood independents in recent years. It's finger-lickin' good.

night falls on manhattan

PARAMOUNT

In this Sidney Lumet-directed flick, an up-and-coming DA (Andy Garcia) prosecutes a drug dealer (Shaik Muhammed-Bey) for shooting some cops, among them the DA's own father. He later discovers that there was corruption at poppa's precinct, forcing him to choose between upholding the law and protecting dad. The resolution



is somewhat predictable, and Garcia's just too earnest to carry *Night's* urban-realist weight. What's curious, though, is how similar the film's dealer is to Larry Davis, the '80s Bronx drug kingpin who wounded six policemen in a shootout and then convinced a jury he acted in self-defense.

Night Falls could have delved into some interesting territory by making its villain as complex as Davis, but that would have made it a very different (and much better) movie. Gary Daughin

squeeze

MIRAMAX

Newcomer Robert Patton-Sprull's *Squeeze* is the story of three at-risk teenagers and the youth counselor who, sometimes literally, attempts to put himself between them and the sure destruction that results from small-time, street-laval hustling. What's notable is that the pivotal

roles are played by actual kids whom Patton-Sprull met in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood; the screen-



play is a synthesis of their experiences. Perhaps, then, this mirrorlike reality makes *Squeeze* what it is: a movie easily 45 minutes too long, matter-of-factly nonacted, and almost resolutely underexposed—common faults of first-time, independent productions. Yet, in part due to these blemishes, *Squeeze* clearly conveys the innate dreariness of the oft-glamorized drug game.

Harry Allen

la promesse

NEW YORKER FILMS

In *La Promesse*, a gritty Belgian import, 15-year-old Igor (Jeremia Renier) helps his father (Olivier Gourmet) smuggle Africans and Russians into Belgium. Dad forces the illegal aliens to do construction work for him and live in his slum tenement while letting his son



smoke, drink, and sample prostitutes. But when a dying African tenant makes Igor promise to look after

his family, the young man has to choose between loyalty to pops and a stranger trapped in a foreign land. *La Promesse* could easily have become a political cliché, but writer-directors Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne offer an original take on issues of race and family. They're smart enough to know that sometimes you can do the right thing and still not escape the past.

G.D.

spring

TRIMARK

Rusty Cundieff, director of *Out-of-left-field* spoofs like *Fear of a Black Hat* and *Tales From the Hood*, tries his hand at romance with



Cundieff's crew

Spring. Brandy (Tisha Campbell) is a law clerk who falls for Montel (Cundieff), an aspiring photographer. Hoochie mama Adina (Paula Jai Parker) and wannabe player Clyde (Joe Torry) are the jealous friends who devise numerous schemes to break up the lovebirds. Eventually they succeed, forcing the characters to reevaluate their approach to relationships. Well, sort of. Instead of giving us character growth, Cundieff gives us caricatures. Ghetto representatives Adina and Clyde are way too over-the-top, and "positiva brotha" Montel is corny, not likable. What was meant to be a tender and funny love story sadly ends up coming off like just another spoof. *Andréa M. Duncan*

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tv

mass appeal

music videos turn to blockbuster films for inspiration

Save your \$8.50. These days, the latest blockbuster is probably playing for free at home on your music television channel, where the lines that separate movies from music videos are blurring faster than you can say "Two for *Titanic*."

Ever since Michael Jackson's *West Side Story*-inspired clip for "Beat It" in 1982, music videomakers have been borrowing from feature films. But today, many of the young, would-be Hollywood directors are taking it to the limit—shooting on 35mm film, using deluxe letterbox format and three-part narratives, and packing in a barrage of sophisticated visual effects from exploding cars to choreographed shootouts.

What's more, the artists in these small-screen epics play more like budding thespians than music-minded entertainers. Take, for instance,



Blues Brother: Reggie Noble

the R&B group Premiere, whose debut video, "Something About You," portrayed them as secret agents breaking into a high-security vault is *a Mission: Impossible*. Or consider Erykah Badu's adaptation of *The Color Purple* for "On and On"; Redman and Method Man's character-driven parody of *The Blues Brothers*, "Whateva Man"; "The Fugees' *Crimson Tide*-like actioner "Ready or Not"; or Warren G's Western "I Shot the Sheriff."

"Nowadays, people watch videos more than

once," says Nick Quested, director of "Ya Playin' Yasef," a martial-arts comedy video starring Jeru the Damaja. "Once they've seen the performance—even if it's cool—they don't want to look at it again and again. They want a high-concept story."

Often the results are highly entertaining, like last year's Hype Williams-directed mini-saga "Street Dreams." Starring Nas as a high-rolling DeNiro-esque gangsta, the video is not only devoid of any traditional music performance, but it also carefully replicates the slick camera work and elaborate sets of *Casino*. Sometimes, however, these "blockbuster imitations" can overpower a song (R. Kelly's melodramatic "Keep It on the Down Low") or confuse audiences with their irrelevance (Tupac's *Mad Max* rendition of "California Love").

But then, music videos have never really been an art debate. They're primarily promotional tools used by labels to boost record sales and make an artist stand out in an increasingly crowded marketplace. "I think these artists are just trying to distinguish themselves in some way," says Kevin Taylor, music researcher for BET, which gets 1,500 to 2,000 video submissions a year. "We've run out of booty. We've run out of designers. We've run out of mansions. We've run out of cars. Now it's time for mini-movies."

Craig Barboza

Craig Barboza

shoot:
SWV
text and
photos by
Minya Oh

It's game time at the video shoot for "Can We," the first of two songs on the *SWV* soundtrack, and director Jesse Vaughan is doing his best chameleon act, trying to keep up his players. *SWV*. After scenes in which the girls twist for a photograph by a photographer who's Cobi's real-life sweetheart, Ishmael (from Digable Planets), followed by grueling, high-pressure performance shots, fatigue sets in, and team morale begins to slip. Sparked by the repping of guest Missy Elliott and Vaughan's own "Can We" hype, the girls dance their hearts out until the beat—and then collapse. "I was dancing so hard I tried to do some of Missy's things," I messaged up my stockings, "says admittedly "camera hog" Taj, laughing. "Taj, at these holes."

gotcha open

Sure Michael Jordan's got the mad game. But tune in to the Classic Sports Network and you'll see that he's just the heir to the Air, "cause it was the Doctor who first dropped a house on the hoop from somewhere in orbit. CSN gives you Kodak moments from players like Erving, Wilt, Bird, and yes, No. 23, back in the day before he played baseball and hung out with cartoon rabbits. It also rewinds classic ball games (the Bronx's Yanks vs. Brooklyn's Dodgers in the 1947 Series), vintage fights (Cassius Clay vs. Archie Moore back in 1962), and great gridiron matchups (Jets vs. Colts in 1969's Super Bowl III). Some things change—the Dodgers live in Cali, Cassius Clay has long been known as the Greatest, and Joe Namath is grayer than your grandma—but on Classic Sports Network, they stay real forever.

Jeff Yan

Jeff Yang



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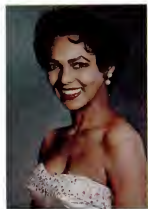
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word

bogle on dandridge

Forty years ago, when New York University Tisch School of the Arts professor Donald Bogle saw *Gone With the Wind*, he wondered where Mammy went every time she left Scarlett. "Even as a kid I realized that black actors played stereotypical roles," says Bogle. "But because they were black, I always wanted to know more about them—there had to be something else going on that the movie wasn't telling me." That seed of childhood curiosity bloomed into the Philadelphia native's career as the leading African-American film historian and preeminent authority on black actors in American pop culture.

Bogle, an award-winning author of three books—including *Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America's Black Female Superstars* (Dacapo), which was adapted into a



four-hour PBS documentary—narrowed the subject of his latest work to one of those women. *Dorothy Dandridge: A Biography* (Amistad), chronicles the starlet's triumphs (she was the first black woman nominated for an Oscar in the Best Actress category for her role as Carmen in the 1954 black musical *Carmen Jones*) and her tribulations (Dandridge was

swindled out of her life savings by her second husband).

Bogle spent six years researching the actress, and remains riveted by both her life and her career. "There was nobody like her in the movies," says Bogle. "She was sexy and gave off something deeper onscreen." Whitney Houston agrees too; she recently bought the book's rights and plans to bring Dandridge's tale to the silver screen. "Dorothy Dandridge is the actress today's crop of film ingenues still look up to," says Bogle.

Yvette Russell



denzel unplugged

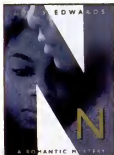
Few African-American film actors regularly get roles of any real significant quality. Fewer still reach true superstar status—top billing, the name power to pack audiences into theaters. And obviously, far fewer achieve that rarest of accolades: a hardcover tome critiquing their filmography.

Douglas Brode's *Denzel Washington: His Films and Career* (Birch Lane Press) is proof that the world's premier black thespian has hit all three marks. After one gets over the flash-flood realization that, damn, Denzel has made a lot of movies—from the memorable (*Crimson Tide*, *Glory*, and *Malcolm X*) to the forgettable (*Virtuosity*, *Heart Condition*)—Brode's thoughtful overview begins to penetrate. But Brode's politics are limited. As support for his idea that "the successful assimilation of blacks into the mainstream" has occurred, he offers that the hunky Washington wears "fashionably casual clothes no different from those a white

star of comparable status might choose." In the end, however, it's Brode's central summation—that Washington is not the new Sidney Poitier but, rather, the new Henry Fonda because he exudes a noble American manner in his portrayal of ordinary characters whom everyone can relate to—that comes off as the book's most original, fresh, and persuasive argument. Harry Allen

n for mystery

Louise Edwards's *N: A Romantic Mystery* (Dutton) takes you on a journey through steamy New Orleans, with a proper, well-educated journalist



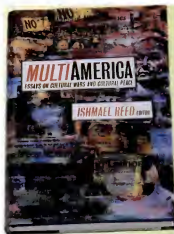
named Aimée DuBois as your guide. Aimée's world is turned upside down by the murder of a teenage boy and her impromptu affair with a sexy, dangerous drug dealer. As Aimée investigates the murder, she learns more about herself—a black woman seemingly out of touch with her own community. Draped in Louisiana's rich Creole culture, Edwards's second novel also offers colorful supporting characters, from a

mother who runs the local drug trade to Aimée's confidante, a white, gay bookstore owner. *N* is a juicy, riveting tale that confidently transfixes the imagination. Jordana Hart

cultural war and peace

In *MultiAmerica: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace* (Viking), a powerful anthology edited by Ishmael Reed, each of the 58 writers/scholars annihilates racial stereotypes. Karla Brundage muses on the identity crisis arising from being a biracial youth in "Passing." In the chapter "The Unbearable Whiteness of Being," Werner Sollors debunks the myth of white superiority, while Robert Fox's "Becoming Post-White" effectively argues that "cultural peace" would come about as a byproduct of whiteness not being considered the standard. With this collection, Reed and co. have provided all those working toward a real new world order with a thought-provoking, empowering tool.

Loretta H. Campbell



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The war between video-game giants Nintendo, Sony, and Sega ain't pretty. But while Nintendo and Sony go toe-to-toe with price slashing and—let's face it—great games, Sega is content to let them slug it out and concentrate on good ol' customer satisfaction.

The fight between the Big Two would bring a smile to General Schwartzkopf's face: Sony upstaged Nintendo in 1995 with the launch of the PlayStation. Nintendo hit back with the release of Mario on the N64 last September, selling 1.7 million units in just three months, compared with Sony's 1.46 million. This March, Sony dropped the price of the PlayStation to "open up the marketplace and bring in new consumers," according to spokesman Jeffrey Fox. (Two weeks later, Nintendo dropped its price too.) Then Fox asserts that Sony's share of the global video-game market is approaching \$3 billion, and that of the "next generation" market (32-bit and 64-bit games only), Sony controls 60 percent. "It's pretty hard to argue with numbers," says Fox. "We are number one."

Not so, according to Nintendo executive Perrin Kaplan, who claims Nintendo has taken 43.8 percent of the \$15 billion global market since the N64's release, compared with Sony's 35.8 percent and Sega's 17.8 percent. Therefore, how can Kaplan and Fox both be right? And more important, why does it matter so much who's "number one"? After all, we are talking relaxation techniques.

So, bring in da Sega. The "Snapple of the video-game industry" is content to chill in third place and direct its energies toward the customer. Instead of stepping up to the plate, Sega is providing, among other things, comprehensive telephone support for their new Saturn console. This customer-is-first approach could put Sega back on top (don't forget, this was the company that stunned Nintendo in the 16-bit war). Steven Lux of Acclaim Entertainment, which supplies software to all three companies, isn't sleeping on Sega. "They're certainly formidable," he says. "It's too early to write them off."

What is certain, however, is that in an industry that's becoming as large as the domestic motion-picture industry, whoever wins out had better not forget who put it there.

Chiedo Nkwocha

Additional reporting by David Jones



crossing the (race) tracks

Video-game racing enthusiasts the world over know that Electronic Arts' Need for Speed was the driving game for the PlayStation; so now, with EA's release of Need for Speed II (\$54.95), gamers will be nuttin' all over their controls even more. Sequels usually don't live up to the original (think: Street Fighter), but EA has learned from the NFS's flaws to kick NFSII into overdrive. Plus, because EA licensed directly from the car manufacturers, you can expect to see more exotic cars like the Lotus GT1, Jaguar XJ220, and the McLaren F1—the fastest production car in the world, with a top speed of 231 mph.

Also, there are more international tracks—including ones in Greece, Norway, even Nepal—and with 50 percent more polygons and streaming art, you'll actually feel like you're driving through the various tundra, desert, and urban scenarios. The performance-based, CD-quality music keeps pace



with the action onscreen to add to the thrill. Damn—if only sex was this good. Gregg Bishop/gregg@vibe.com

diggity dawg

Leave it to Japanese game designers to base a title around hip hop before their supposedly freer-thinking American counterparts did. Sony's PaRappa, for the PlayStation, puts you in the role of the title character, a cartoon dog with a bright red ski cap. Your goal: to rhyme through a succession of adventures and win the affection of Sunny, your true love—not a dog, by the way, but a sunflower. This freaky, cross-species thing is only the beginning of PaRappa's weird world. Helping you get your flow down are a moose in a hunting jacket, a reggae frog, and a seneal with an onion for a head. As with the old electronic memory game Simon, you must repeat audio cues, or lyrics, by pressing buttons on your controller at just the right



moment in order to complete each track. Got it? Good. Now all you have to do is go to Japan—PaRappa's U.S. release date has yet to be announced.

Harry Allen

the digital roundup

what's got it going on in multimedia

Feel the Force: In Yoda Stories, the next release from LucasArts CD-ROM, Luke Skywalker has to complete a series of tasks to become a Jedi Knight. Featuring "game generating" technology that creates ever-changing scenarios, Yoda Stories should manage to keep you busy till the next batch of Star Wars flicks comes out....Game on: Though the N64 has sold as fast as subscriptions to Danni's Hard Drive, it still doesn't have enough games for sports fans. That'll soon change, however, as more and more Japanese imports cross over. Among them, J-League Perfect Striker, soon to be International Soccer 64. The high-resolution imaging on this soccer sim should add further credence to Nintendo's claimed superiority. You can foul, shoot, and score all right long; but, hey, don't forget you've got to get up to go to work in the morning....Language electric: The Ebonics Leetric Library (<http://www.novusordo.com/index.htm>) is a Web site that translates English prose into Ebonics form. Designed with tongue firmly in cheek, the site offers variations on passages such as Clinton's inaugural address and Milton's Paradise Lost. Joking aside, the site also offers a detailed history of the role of black English in society. What it is, yo.

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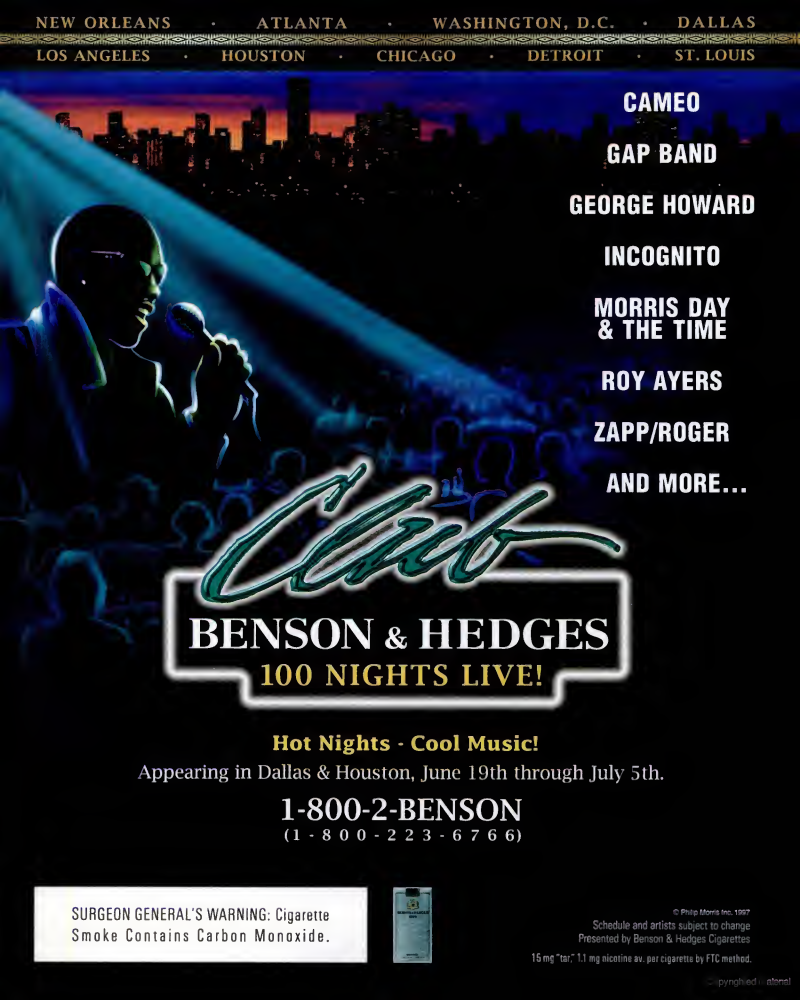
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REVOLUTIONS



SCARFACE 'THE UNTOUCHABLE'

RAP-A-LOT

BY DAVID BRY

Black hat. Black suit. Black cane. Black boots. The outlaw steps through swinging doors and stands, chewing a cigar, at the front of a packed saloon. The piano man stops abruptly. All heads turn. Conversations cut short. A handful of poker chips click-clatter on a tabletop. Then there's silence. Nobody moves. Nobody speaks. Nobody's smilin'.

For 10 years now, Brad "Scarface" Jordan has cut an imposing figure in hardcore rap's consciousness. Coming out of Houston in the late '80s as a member of the infamous Geto Boys, a death-obsessed Scarface told graphic tales of the cocaine cowboy lifestyle with a God-fearing introspection rare among rap writers. With his new album, *The Untouchable*, he once again pours his heart into scaring America silly.

In 1990 the Geto Boys and their distributor, Geffen Records, got into a highly publicized scrap that exposed the hypocrisy of censorship to a national audience. The company, which tolerated such disturbing expressions of white anger as Axl Rose's venomous rants and Andrew Dice Clay's tasteless comedy, refused to release the black rap group's self-titled, major-label debut (they had previously recorded two other albums in 1988—*Making Trouble* and *Grip It!*—on Houston indie Rap-a-Lot Records). Fueled by



frustration, the Boys returned to Rap-a-Lot and created 1991's victorious *We Can't Be Stopped*. "Let's talk about a scandal," spat Scarface on the title track. "The album Geffen found too hot to handle." Meanwhile, Face's partners Bushwick Bill and Willie D summed up a community's outrage. "And they say we're a racist act / Now ain't that the pot callin' the kettle black?" True vindication, though, came with a platinum certification for 1991's "Mind Playin' Tricks on Me," an undisputed rap classic that poignantly chronicled the delusional paranoia that accompanies the heavy drug game. In a lyric catharsis that gave voice to the suicidal feelings that kept him in a mental ward for two teenage years, Scarface gave rap its most sensitive admission of psychological vulnerability. For proof of the artistic validity in the much-maligned gangsta genre, look no further than Brad Jordan "sitting alone in a four-cornered room, staring at candles."

Scarface and the Geto Boys brought the Hip Hop Nation a third coast—the Gulf—and with it a new variation of sound. The G in their funk stood for "gumbo," and their swampy, guitar-based tracks owed as much to the region's deep blues tradition as to James Brown's breakbeats or P-Funk's space bass.

With his first two solo ventures, 1991's *Mr. Scarface Is Back* and 1993's *The World Is Yours*, Scarface stuck to the Geto Boys' formula for golden success. In 1994, though, he established a forceful identity outside the group with the confessional concept album *The Diary*. Face's own classical piano playing and soap-opera synth strings created a gothic setting for his cautionary words of woe. On the ghostly, organ-haunted lament "Never Seen a Man Cry," his musical vision reached a second zenith.

From the ominous opening strokes of *The Untouchable*'s intro, the million fans who read *The Diary*'s pages will be comforted to know that the Scarface rule book remains the same. Sinewy waves of synthesizers wrap songs like "Southside" into tight fists of funk, and Scarface brawls with those old inner demons. "So why you figure I been standin' here shakin' / 'Cause the devil's close and he came here for me, but I can't face him."

As a slow, gut-thumping beat pounds piano chords into the hollows of Scarface's echoing baritone, a synthesized trail of percussion rattles like a diamondback coiled to strike.

Although a chrome sheen of overproduction mars "Smile"—a posthumous Tupac duet—Scarface delivers a genuinely moving requiem for his departed friend. "And as you journey into outer space," he solemnly raps, "may the angels help to lead your way."

Scarface is a professional for sure—he knows his area of expertise better than most—but at times it seems as if he's merely punching the clock. All the trendy business is taken care of. There's the Zapp-inspired voice box on the title track's chorus; the requisite ode to any true gangsta's No. 1 gal, "Mary Jane"; and the dismal Dr. Dre-produced single, "Game Over" (also featuring Ice Cube and Too Short), which aims at the pop charts, banking solely on name-brand recognition.

Scarface, of course, never pretends otherwise. *The Untouchable* is straight product—polished and packaged for sale—but overall, it gets the job done. As he promises over the creeping bass line of "No Warning": "If any mother-fucker want pain, I bring the full bottle."

Although *The Untouchable* isn't the shining symbol of drama that marks Scarface's best work, the album certainly has its high moments of emotional lows. The ironically titled "Sunshine" flaunts Face's patented charm: Flipping the usual impact of one of hip hop's oft-used samples of choice, our villainous hero remakes the skyward Roy Ayers tune "Everybody Loves the Sunshine" into a sad meditation on death. As a slow, gut-thumping beat pounds piano chords into the hollows of Scarface's echoing baritone, a synthesized trail of percussion rattles like a diamondback coiled to strike. The man in black has murdered yet another victim. Morbid and hopeless, conscious of a vengeful lord's judgment, Scarface sits alone in a dark corner with his head in his hands. "My life, my life, my life," he says. Sunshine? He hasn't seen it for days.

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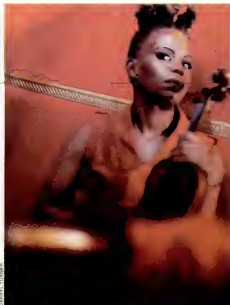
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REGINA CARTER 'SOMETHING FOR GRACE'

ATLANTIC JAZZ

Like eccentric clarinetist Don Byron, jazz violinist Regina Carter is a little out there. But that certainly doesn't hinder her sophomore LP, *Something for Grace*. A few tunes are strictly easy-listening material, but her nimble pizzicato on "Down town Underground" and her tormented tremolo on the bluesy "Soul Eyes" demonstrate precisely why Wynton Marsalis invited her to join his *Blood on the Fields* ensemble. The title track is Carter's most ebullient display of musicianship—which is only fitting since it's dedicated to her mother. If you have nightmares about squeaky grade school violin recitals, Carter's bowmanship will wake you with tenderness.

OU Lima



NANCY WILSON 'IF I HAD MY WAY'

COLUMBIA

In this era of refined, short-attention-span chaos, our collective sense of standards has hit an all-time low. Dig: The dollar ain't really worth more than 60 cents, Versace and Cristal are considered the bomb shits, and every young thang wif pipes, attitude, 'n' a record is called a diva. Let's table the other stuff for a future cyberchat and talk about this "diva" deal.

Webster's defines the word this way: "as denoting one exalted or revered as supremely good or powerful"; in short, a goddess. All this is to say that due to a high level of untested hang time, ain't no real divas under the age of 30. Aretha, Chaka, Patti, Whitney, Shirley Horn,

Abbey Lincoln, Cassandra—these ladies are true divas. Mary J., Erykah B., and the rest of the crew, let's see if you make it to 2001 A.D.

Speaking of real divas, Nancy Wilson is back with her first album in a few years (and her 60th overall), *If I Had My Way*. Known for her keen sense of drama, sophisticated wryness, mercurial phrasing, and deft grasp of a lyric, La Wilson has sustained a global following for more than three decades and influenced vocalists from Anita Baker to Oran "Juice" Jones (his classic "The Rain" was a hustla's update of Wilson's signature opus, "Guess Who I Saw Today"). Pity, then, that *If I Had My Way* plays out like some strange, desperate apology from the singer.

An uneasy alliance of tired drumbeats, uninspired keyboard programming, derivative songs, and insensitively glossy production, *If I Had My Way* manages to make Wilson the ghost in her own machine. Only on "Wish You Were Here" (with Brian McKnight) and the album-closing, de facto trilogy of "Just a Fool in Love," "Loving You, Loving Me," and "More Love" does she display her jelly-roll jazz soul. Nancy Wilson deserves better—and so do we.

Tom Terrell

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KRS-ONE 'I GOT NEXT' JIVE



KRS-One is a larger-than-life 20th-century poet. How else could you categorize a formerly homeless street survivor who spearheaded hip hop's Stop the Violence movement, posed with an Uzi on his second album cover, *By All Means Necessary*, exposed the fact that illegal business controls America, cried out against police brutality, and even extolled the virtues of vegetarianism? Who else has supplanted Prince Be of P.M. Dawn over verbal beef, done commercials for Sprite, and proclaimed "the revolution is basketball" for a Nike ad? Self-educated, arrogant, defiant, self-serving, brilliant, difficult, and self-centered, Kris Parker is nothing if not a walking contradiction.

With the release of *I Got Next*, KRS's controversial "I am hip hop" claim a few years back resonates with fuller meaning; this in light of the fact that, creatively, rap has fallen on hard times. And just like hip hop today, *I Got Next*, Kris's ninth album in 11 years, is a disjointed, formulaic mess—a sonic desert alleviated by the sprinkling of an elusive oasis here and there.

DITC beatmaker Showbiz, along with Domingo and the Blastmaster himself, provides the LP with its sturdiest productions. Showbiz, especially, looks out on the got-your-back number "A Friend" with a creepy violin-led composition. But KRS is torn between the need to stay true to the underground and the desire to shine as an Everyman hero. For the *real* heads, he presents the relentless skills of "The MC," the highly pretentious (even for Kris) "Over Your Head," and the raucous spurt of "H.L.P.H.O.P." For the masses, there's the made-for-Hot 97 "Heartbeat," a variation of the 1981 Treacherous Three hit, featuring radio personality Angie Martinez rhyming (that's not a typo). "Step Into a World (Rapture's Delight)" pits Blondie's "Rapture" against the beloved breakfast from the Mohawks' "The Champ," eking out a split-decision triumph—but only after numerous listenings.

The self-proclaimed hardest-lyric artist even collaborates with an R&B singer. "Stop Schemin'," featuring Joe, embodies you-know-you-fucked-up sentiments, as Kris laments his fictional homie's unlawful ways. Even more puzzling is Redman's appearance on two joints in which he acts as hype-man but doesn't rhyme—it's a waste.

If the Teacher weren't such an overachiever, he would realize that trying to rewrite the book of hip hop with unnecessarily complex rhyme schemes and fluctuating, overzealous flows, however admirable, is never a proper substitute for being just plain dope—something he's still capable of pulling off (just ask absent collaborator DJ Premier). Well, there's always next time.

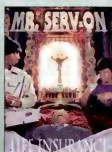
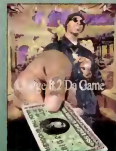
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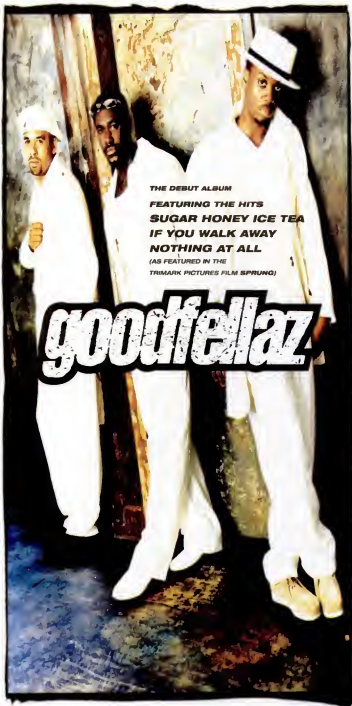
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THE BOOT CAMP CLIK 'FOR THE PEOPLE' DUCK DOWN/PRIORITY

If Queensbridge's native sons resemble the denizens of TV's *Cheers*—guys who are big on hometown pride and who mostly hold court in their domain, occasionally venturing into the outside world to wreak mischief—then the Wu-Tang Clan members mirror those on *Seinfeld*: an ensemble of offbeat, quirky individuals whose various paths all lead back to Jerry's apartment (Shao Lin, if you will). To complete the metaphor, Brooklyn's Boot Camp Clik are best compared to *Full House*—a heterogeneous mix of entities who bond together in times of hardship for mutual support (see: the nervous situation with their previous label).

On *For the People*, the WVBCC's first compilation effort, the gang are all here. There's Buckshot with his breathless control of singsong cadences; the inviting and sinister duality of Tek & Steele (Da Cocoa Brovaz, formerly Smif-N-Wessun); Helth Skeltah's Ruck and Rock and their lava-meets-water flow. And then there's the Orinoo Gunn Clappaz, complete with the tri-pronged attack: Starang's belligerent witticisms, Top Dog's mellifluous, ragga-tinged sprays, and Louierville Sluggah's scrappy schoolyard demeanor.

Augmented by a host of Boot Campian upstarts, the crew (which immortalized Ebonics with Black Moon's 1993 *Enta da Stage*) spit in the face of all critical, preconceived notions of demographic sound designs. Smooth yet hard like obsidian slates, jams like "Night Riders," "Rag Tyme," and "Headz R Redee" (the follow-up to the *New Jersey Drive* smash "Headz Ain't Ready") work well next to the *Wildstyle*-ish romp of "Down by Law," the traumatized spliff session "Black Out," and the Canbe bounce of "Rugged Terrain." These tracks also act as a suspension bridge for below-par attempts by Louierville ("The Dugout")



and the Bucktown Juveniles ("Go for Yours").

These souljams come on like a stampeding herd of impalas, with a ragfuf, unorchestrated flow of synchronicity and the common cause of elevating their genre from its stagnant state. And with the loss of two of hip hop's most illuminated stars in the past year, *For the People* is not only therapeutic, it's Must-Hear Hip Hop.

christian ex

DAVID D. DAVIS



CRU 'DA DIRTY 30' VIOLATOR

The 30 tracks on Cru's *Da Dirty 30* (a title that also refers to N.Y.C.'s corruption-plagued 30th Police Precinct) often flow together like a bugged-out mix show—for example, when heavy breathing from the "Shootout" skit is incorporated into the beat of "Ten to Run." Yogi kicks rhymes with Q-Tip-style smoothness; the Mighty Ha grows and sings crazily à la O' Dirty Bastard; and Chadio fills in the rest with clever wordplay, including a well-crafted tribute to writer Donald Goines. Their tough tales of South Bronx life culminate in the cautionary—and eerily prescient—"Armageddon," in which a hip hop party ends with all the rap stars killing each other.

Judson Kilpatrick

SOUNDTRACK QWEST RECORDS

On *Spring*, the soundtrack for the new Rusty Cundieff (*Tales From the Hood*) film that details the courtship of a lovesick couple, the songs all follow the relationship theme. Things start off with the Brooklyn player vibe of Jay-Z's "Who You Wit," in which the slickest rapper in charge reveals his paranoia in the realm of urban romance. Unfortunately, though, with the exception of Jay-Z's minimal, iceberg-smooth groove and the mack musings of Mr. Dalvin's "2 Nite's the Nite," the hip hop on this disc is lackluster. "Freak," by the Money Boss Players, is a lame West Coast-styled remake of the classic Whodini song "Freaks Come Out

Thankfully *Spring* is saved by its R&B guitars (who woulda guessed that). Charming newcomers Keystone contribute "If It Ain't Love" and the moody "Let Me Know," a straight-up begging song in the Keith Sweat tradition. In addition to starring in the film, Tisha Campbell and Tichina Arnold collaborate on a remake of the vintage 1977 Emotions song "Don't Ask My Neighbor"; their fierce vocals transform this track into a '90s anthem of sisterhood. And as an attempt at taking soul to the next level of rhythmic futurism, the drum 'n' bass remix of Aaliyah's "One in a Million" is brilliant.

LESCHER 'RHYTHM & BEATS' WARNER BROS.

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[illegible]

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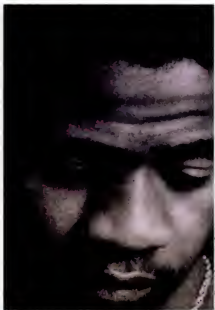
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AL GREEN 'ANTHOLOGY' THE RIGHT STUFF/HI RECORDS



Effortlessness has always been Al Green's trademark. One of the greatest vocalists in popular music, Green is unrivaled in his subtle, intimate way with a song. He sings in a conversational style, using a full range of phrases, rising to either a sweet ecstatic falsetto or a feverish hungry growl. Green is as given to messages as Marvin Gaye; but, like John Lennon, he distills his central sentiments through words like "love." With these signature effects, his performances evoke feelings that are yearning, spiritual, soulful—even silly.

The four-disc *Anthology* is an aural documentary of Green's career as a soul

singer, including all his chart hits, songs from the tentative, musically patchy early years, live performances, alternate takes, and spoken segments. Green's speaking voice, we learn, is no less mannered and eccentric than his singularly impassioned singing style.

Born in Arkansas in 1946, he began by singing spirituals with the Greene Brothers, a family group directed by his father. But after leaving the group—in part, because his taste for Sam Cooke records didn't sit well with his dad—Green joined the Creations (who later became the Soul Mates) and cut 1967's gospel-tinged "Back Up Train," which opens *Anthology*. His covers of the Beatles' "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and the Doors' "Light My Fire" reveal his love of rock, but his interpretive powers are put to more sublime use on a 1973 live version of the Bee Gees' "How Can You Mend a Broken Heart."

It was when he hooked up with Hi Records bandleader/producer Willie Mitchell, in 1969, that Green got the encouragement he needed to relax into his voice and to sing less hard. With Mitchell, Green refined the more frantic, southern-based Stax sound (Otis Redding, Sam & Dave) to a cooler, spare yet fat mix of bass, horns, organ, and sinewy jazz guitar set to sweet, archly used strings. This blend of pop and soul was the perfect complement to the suave grit of Green's voice.

What followed was a succession of smash hits including the ageless "Let's Stay Together," "Call Me (Come Back Home)," and "L-O-V-E (Love)," the gracious "Look What You Done for Me," the searing "Love and Happiness," and the funky milestone "Take Me to the River." The latter illustrated the carnal/spiritual dilemma that waged constantly in Green's art, and anticipated his eventual shift from R&B to gospel. More recent songs like "Belle" confirmed his lyric transition, yet the religious material he has sung for the past two decades receives only a passing nod on this collection.

More illuminating than comprehensive (where are the country and western covers "For the Good Times" and "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry"?), *Anthology* is a loving, detailed portrait of an incomparable voice.

George Pitts



CHRIS ROCK

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Associate Producer: Harry Harper
Executive Producer: Chris Rock



KEEPIN' IT REAL FUNNY
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BOOM SHOTS

FALL OF A REGGAE STAR screamed the headline of a disturbing article by Balford Henry in the *Jamaican Weekly Gleaner* dated November 23, 1987. "Ten years ago, JUNIOR BYLES was a singing superstar with several hits to his credit. Today, he rummages for food in garbage bins outside Kingston's top studios. The sight of Byles, sucking rotten fruits and vegetables, generates a feeling of shame among all who knew him...."

Kerrie "Junior" Byles was born in Kingston, in 1948. As a teenager he organized a vocal trio called the Versatiles, who went on to record for Joe Gibbs's Amalgamated label with emerging production giants Lee "Scratch" Perry and Niney the Observer. By 1970, Scratch began voicing Byles as a solo artist; Perry built his reputation (and his renowned Black Ark studio) on the success of the Wailers and Junior Byles, who was dropping blockbusters like "Beat Down Babylon" and "Curly Locks."

This rich stage of Byles's career is chronicled on *Curly Locks* (Heartbeat Records), a first-rate CD bursting with alternate takes, rare deejay versions, and transcendent blasts of Lee Perry and the Upsetters' unique brand of musical madness.

Almost as remarkable as the music are Leroy Pearson's liner notes, which courageously chronicle one reggae artist's tragic descent into suffering. Byles attempted suicide in August 1975 after hearing reports of Haile Selassie's death. After spending time at the Bellevue Hospital to treat his mental illness, Byles recorded the classic **Fade Away—which is what eventually happened to his career.** With any luck, the new release will spark a renaissance. Heartbeat Records's Chris Wilson says the label is placing proceeds from the album in escrow for the artist should he ever get in touch.

Heartbeat serves up another "where are they now?" gem with the HEP-TONES compilation *Sea of Love*, a true collector's album showcasing hard-to-find selections like "Nine Pounds of Steel" and "Be a Man," as well as unexpected covers of songs by Curtis Mayfield, Bob Dylan, and the Righteous Brothers. From the late 1960s until the mid-1970s, Leroy Sibley, Barry Llewellyn, and Earl Morgan became Studio One's premier hit-makers (their original *Heptones on Top* release is perhaps the definitive rock steady album). Cossone Dodd encouraged Sibley to master the bass, and Sibley eventually joined the ranks of crucial Studio One sessionmen like Jackie Mittoo and Ernest Ranglin, participating in the creation of riddim tracks that will never die.

Since then, Sibley has gone on to a solo career, touring widely and releasing a variety of dancehall singles. On last year's "Original Full Up," Sibley and Beanie Man teamed up on a Digital-B relick of the Studio One riddim Sibley first wrote and played bass on. "I didn't know what I was doing when I wrote this one," he sings, "I never know that one riddim could last so long."

The everlasting "Full Up" track is better known as the "Kutchie," named for the enormous Mighty Diamonds—and later, Musical Youth—hit it propelled. Like so many creative pioneers in reggae, though, Sibley went virtually uncompensated. But with hard work, a positive mental attitude, and a little help from Jah, he's been fortunate enough to escape a sufferer's fate. Check the lyrics:

*I never make much money from this one yah
But I still feel good.
'Cause every time a sound box string up
Leroy Sibley's in your neighborhood.*



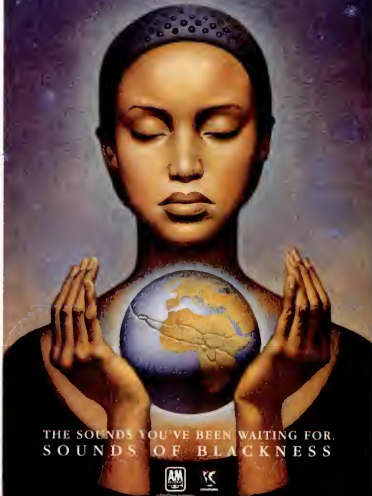
Junior Byles

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BOOGIEMONSTERS' GOD SOUND^{EMI}

"If we stay fluid, we'll survive" was the coded credo of the four-man cipher Boogie-monsters back in 1994. These molecular words bonded and brimmed with the single "Recognized Thresholds of Negative Stress." The Virginia State students remained just as evocative throughout their debut album, *Riders of the Storm: The Underwater Album*; tracks like "Old Man Jacob's Well" (reminiscent of De La Soul's "Millie Pulled a Pistol on Santa") and "Mark of the Beast" cut deep, descending into the debasement of human nature.

Now, as man nears his six-foot-deep end, the Monsters have affably downsized to members Vex and Mondo. The Boogie flow now travels in the form of *God Sound*, and Vex is down with the Rex—represent Christ almighty sire—in "M.C." They prove that spirituality can avoid that corny DC Talk shit, rather, "The Beginning of the End" rips what it sows. Opening with Fantasy Three-styled harmonics, brooding organ, and a soulful moan of uncertainty, "The Beginning" asks, "In whose God do you trust?" On "Mark of the Beast II (R.S.V.)," it's Christmas 2009, and Mondo gets a Gestapo visit, a UPC code, and a concentration camp vacation package (just what he wanted). "Photographic Memory" warns against getting caught up in the television/Internet human conditioning program.

While at times Boogie's mike deliverance falters in Pharcyde/OutKast inflections ("Body") on "The Lunchroom Table," Vex spews what's on his mind over the duo's handmade beats. The boards are abetted by Caspa

Vex, Mondo



TWICE TWICE^{SILAS}

Sticking to the now standard R&B formula of church-trained voices, a who's who list of producers (including D'Angelo), below average rhymes, and the ability to use the word "freak" as noun, verb, adjective, and adverb, Twice—two sets of Cleveland-born twins—embark on their debut project. The result is a sound about as distinctive as those songs played three hours into the Quiet Storm: pleasant but sounding vaguely reminiscent of something you just heard. With tracks like "Make You Say Daddy" and "Swing It," it's obvious that Twice are trying to get you hot, but their vinyl foreplay is as untantalizing as it is uninspired.

Ayana Byrd

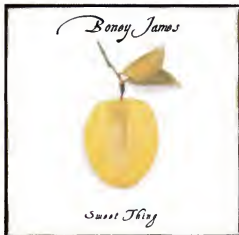
and Domingo, giving the BMs a wiser, if sometimes repetitive, kick-snare thump throughout. Pilfering thunder are guests Bahamadia ("Say Word") and producer/MC Jon Doe, whose guttural cadence rides his rhythm high hats and congas on "Whistles in the Wind": "Release your mind / Slip with me between the crease of time / 'Cause peace of mind is a condition people cease to find."

Currently, subterfuge theory is as omnipresent in hip hop as Gideons are in Motel 6666. With very few sins, *God Sound* manages to meet the Monsters' ultimate goal of enlightening; their messages sometimes even burn engrains in the head.

Dave Tompkins



hungry?



saxophone, sweet, smooth, satisfying.

The new album including the single "I Still Dream," featuring Al Jarreau.

Produced by Pearl Brown and Boney James.

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REVOLUTIONS
BY GREGG TATE

THE REAL MUSIC

Altist Antonio Hart has been kicking it on the young lions jazz set for more than a New York minute now, blowing hard and fast like it ain't nobody's business if he do. On his latest, *Here I Stand*, Hart builds on his reputation as one of the major comers on his hom of this generation. Favoring a steel-studded tone, he brings to mind breathless wonders like Sonny Fortune and Gary Bartz, who also liked to spit out long-lined bullets of love from their axes. Hart tries on a number of styles for size this outing, including two that black Americans should just never try to fzuk with: reggae and Latin. But before you get to those cuts, you get to hear my man blast into hyperspace on the album's opener, "The Community." Here, Hart roars like a fire-breathing dragon, chomping on that neo-bop like it was a Crooklyn chewsick.

Next up, however, is the aforementioned reggae-type jam "True Friends," which starts admirably but runs into trouble via a bridge section that comes off like a Herbie Hancock *Head Hunters* pastiche. The stiffness of the rhythm section doesn't help, but Hart's soprano has got this smooth-talking, smooth-walking way that chills things out. To hear what the young man can do with the blues, check for "Brother Nasheet" (dedicated to Hart's tasty drummer, Nasheet Waits). Hart's organ-trio seminar featuring the legendary Shirley Scott. **"Ven Devorame Otra Vez" is a noble attempt at salsa jazz, but Latin swing requires some other kind of suave that Hart and crew ain't quite got on lock. Take two Fania All-Stars albums and call a ninja in the morning, yo.**

Where things get exciting again is on "Riots...the Voice of the Unheard." You can tell from the section writing here that Hart had been mightily impressed with the hom arrangements Wayne Shorter was getting into around the time of classic Blue Note jammies like "Schizophrenia" and "The All-Seeing Eye." At the time, Shorter was twisting Ellington and Stravinsky inventions into his own dramatic fugue

formations. Hart isn't the melodist that Shorter was as a composer (his attempts don't quite slice open your heart in similar fashion), but he is certain to follow to loftier heights as he develops.

One brother who's been kicking around for several generations of young lionism now is Joseph Bowie, trombone-playing brother of famed trumpeter Lester. The younger Bowie's band, Defunkt, have promoted and processed a flotilla of cutting-edge New York instrumentalists since their Lower East Side debut, way back in the late '70s. We're talking heads like Ronny Drayton, Vernon Reid, Melvin Gibbs, and Kim Clarke. Now out on Bowie's own Grassroots Records label is *Classic Defunkt Live*, recorded at a festival in Stuttgart, Germany in the nine-six.



If you've never been to a high-octane *Defunkt Show* near you, come get up on this: rampaging horns, screaming guitars, and funk-maximus bass work from sista Kim Clarke on over-the-top, lust-driven vehicles like "Strangling Me With Your Love" add up to a thermonuclear sweat. Best part of the set, though, just might be when Bowie explains why he's covering Muddy Waters' "She's Nineteen Years Old." Apparently Bowie did a tour with the King of the Chicago Blues during which Muddy told him how, out of all things on this earth, what he liked best was a "young thang." You go, boy.



DIAMOND D 'HATRED, PASSION AND INFIDELITY' MERCURY

Let's see: One cup of Cristal, a tablespoon of Versace, and a heaping teaspoon of video-ready chickenheads with furs, and what do you have? Diamond's latest, *Hatred, Passion and Infidelity*—that's what. Who would have believed that the producer of such blinding beats and rhymes as "Sally Got a One Track Mind" (from his exceptional 1992 debut, *Stunts, Blunts, & Hip Hop*), Brand Nubian's "Punks Jump Up to Get Beat Down," and the Fugees' "The Score" would succumb to Big Willie—it's on his second album? This epidemic has taken on grand proportions: On "Can't Keep My Grants to Myself," Diamond talks about a girl who spends all his dough "stayin' trim in the sauna / Sportin' Donina and Dolce Gabbana." Alas, will we ever find a cure?

But just when you've slapped your forehead red in disbelief,

"Five Fingers of Death," featuring the verbal acrobatics of Big L and Lord Finesse, and the ghetto explanatory "No Wonduh" (with a snippet from Posdnuos's rhyme on "Stakes Is High")—"No wonder where we live is called the projects"—as the hook barely rescue the patient. Those tracks are crucial, along with "This One," Diamond's the-things-you-do relationship ode to his girlfriend, amped by a loop of Busta Rhymes repeating "This one right mutha-fuckin' here."

But that's it. If you're not concentrating—and here, that's easy to do—you might think that the rest of *Hatred, Passion and Infidelity* is one ridiculous, 60-minute song. Tsk, tsk. *Stunts, Blunts, & Hip Hop* was such a masterpiece. Who would guess the title told it all?

The Blackpots

LEVERT THE WHOLE SCENARIO ATLANTIC



As you ride through Harlem on a breezy Saturday afternoon, glancing at the beaming, proud black faces, landmark churches, soul food carry-outs, and corner barbershops, Levert's care-free new album provides the ideal soundtrack for this urban landscape.

Like the latest exceptional offerings from fellow R&B veterans the Isley Brothers and Keith Sweat, Levert brothers Gerald and Sean and cuz Marc Gordon do more than keep up with the Joneses. With a polished mix of up-tempo tracks such as "Swing My Way" and "Ain't No Thang," and poignant slow jams like "Mama's House" and "Like Water," *The Whole Scenario* sets a standard for new jack soulsters to measure up to.

Tracy E. Hopkins

TONY TONITONE

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AND
THINKING OF YOU



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REVOLUTIONS
BY THE BLACKSPOT

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Chuck Young is one of the illest kids I've heard in a bit coming out on the R&B block. Wearing the grit of the Dirty South like an authoritative badge, this army brat from Mount Holly, N.J. has something to offer the genre other than whining odes to the booty. On his six-song demo, Young stays clear of the "oohhh-baby" Aaron Hall/Jodeci crutch that's usually employed to disguise a lack of talent; instead, his mellow voice and slick lyrics prove he is the smooth, sedate Sensitive Male he thinks he is. On the bluesy, piano-driven "No More," Young reprimands: "You don't even look my way / You don't even have the heart to say that you don't love me no more."

Young's vocals are clearly influenced by the blues; one listen will put your mind front and center in a dimly lit, smoke-filled nightclub. Check the celebratory love song "Always," as well as "Perfect Place," which, over a sample of OutKast's "13th Floor/Growing Old," seeks to create a utopia of nationalities. Needless to say, Chuck Young will be a welcome and worthwhile addition to the world of rhythm and blues. A&R reps, duty calls. Give VIBE's own Reggie Miller a ring at 800-325-3801. You won't be disappointed.

Here's the scenario: **You've been thinking about that special someone who's about to come over, and you need some mood music to make sure you, uh, take it to the bridge.** Calm down and throw in Britt Prentice. Now sit back and allow his Luther Vandross-ness to take effect. Prentice's album, *Unchained Soul*, is the perfect theme music for zone coasting—you know, like doing a buck ten down a nighttime highway, cleaning up a room, or even writing this column.

Completely written and produced by the Bethesda, Md. singer, *Unchained* spells

falls through every sector of falling in love with radio-friendly but soulful tracks like "Thru the Motions" and "Luv I Feel." Become a believer; check your local record stores or call Rick Granasso at Phoenix Records at 800-494-0659.

Last month, I featured a group by the name of P. Pullz—you know, the same folks who transformed the Notorious B.I.G. into a nervous Pakistani storekeeper? Well, there was a slight boobo in the information given. If you need to get in contact with the Notorious A.R.A.B., call Kenny Patt at 917-775-1568. Maybe now all you labels can stop calling that beef-patty spot (them cats were getting a little on the shook side).

Also, there have apparently been problems with sending material for possible—emphasis on "possible"—review in this column. In case you missed the address on the masthead, you can send your dope independent releases or demo tapes to: Notes From the Underground, Attention: The Blackspot, VIBE Magazine, 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10016. *Very important:* Please include your contact information on the tape. There's nothing more aggravating than receiving a bomb-ass cassette and having no way to get in touch with the artist.



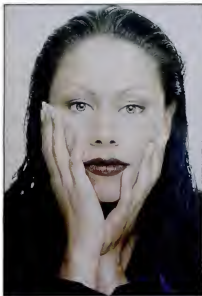
Chuck Young

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DINA CARROLL
'ONLY HUMAN'
MERCURY

After establishing herself with her 1993 debut album, *So Close*, Dinak Carroll continues to display her own brand of poignant soul with an unconventional sophomore effort. She certifies her intricate songwriting ability with intimate tracks like the "70s-tinged" "I Didn't Mean to Hurt You," but fails to be contemporary with lame production on "World Come Between Us." However, legendary New York DJ David Morales saves the day on *Only Hu-man* with the rugged tracks "Living for the Weekend" and "Mind Body & Soul"—dance-floor sureshots that complement Dinak's smooth, textured vocals. **Vikki Toback**

40 THEVZ 'HONOR AMONGST THEVZ' MERCURY

Gangsta rap's been getting such a bad rap lately that we've forgotten the funk that made it fun. Coolio protégés 40 Thevz are no high-profile haters or violence instigators. They actually give a damn about themselves ("Fly Away"), brothers ("Neva Gonna Git Nowhere"), and



shorties ("Thank God

for the Children"). They even call women "women" in "All I Wanna Do"; so there is indeed some honor amongst these thieves.

One of the album's best moments comes when Kurtis Blow resurfaces and rhymes on "Tennis Shoe Pimpin'." helping to make *Honor*

Amongst Theyz worth taking—to a party, that is.

Malik R. Singleton



ZAKIYA 'LOVE LIKE MINE' A&M

On her impressive debut, 19-year-old Zakiya exhibits an innocent freshness reminiscent of the young Tracie Spencer. Her featherly voice soars on the gospel-inspired "In My Eyes," in which she hails the Lord: "Praising you is all right / You're by my side for every breath I breathe." But church is over on the fun though syrupy ghetto fairy tale "Jimmy," which finds Zakiya yearning for the love of a young player. Unfortunately, just

when you're feeling her smooth style, a sped-up house remake of the Jackson 5's "I Wanna Be Where You Are" hits you from out of nowhere, undermining the cohesiveness of an otherwise enjoyable album.

Kim Ford

Kim Ford



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NUYORICAN SOUL

"Nuyorican Soul puts sex, God and urban flava back into dance music....And Vega and Gonzalez have dropped the album of the year."

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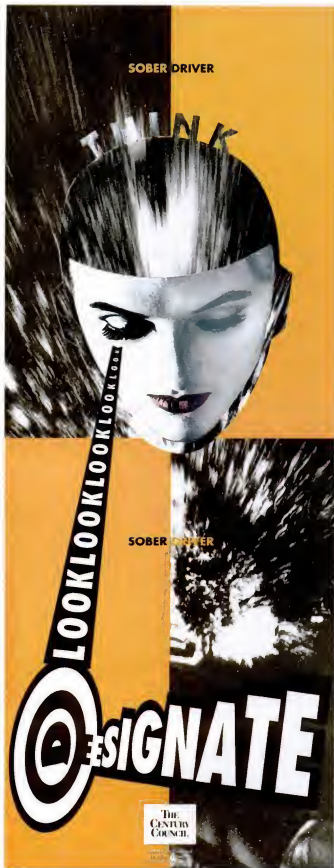
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Q20 QUESTIONS

1. Judging from her "Til Be" video, do you think Foxy Brown has been taking graduate courses at the L.L. Cool J Institute of Lip Licking?

2. How ridiculous is BET's *Planet Groove*? 3. And what talent does the host, Rachel, have besides cleavage? 4. After watching him accept his Oscar, we wonder, Has Cuba Gooding Jr. become his Rod Tidwell character, or was he just *really* happy to be there? 5. But will folks please stop saying "Show me the money"? 6. Why does it seem that in almost every city New Edition perform, one of them has to get locked up? 7. Why are we feeling like this is their last tour? 8. And won't they please get some outside rappers? Ronnie and Mike: Shut up, already. *Damn*. 9. After spotting him on the *Jenny Jones* show (along with most of the cast from *What's Happening!*), we're trying to figure this out: Why does Todd Bridges still get press? 10. Gee, why did we just ask that question? 11. Pauly Shore. Why? 12. How come there were 11 head coach vacancies in the NFL and only one of the black assis-

ing Jewel when she's just a low-budget version of Trac Chapman? 15. Doesn't listening to Warren G's "I Shot the Sheriff" make you sad



Photo: Rachel



Cuba: Show him the door!

all over again that EPMD broke up? 16. When is black film going to get off this real-life tip and deal with some serious deviant hoodoo surrealism, à la David Lynch, Quentin Tarantino, or David Cronenberg? 17. Okay, we know it was a while back, but why aren't we even mad that *Riviera* won the Grammy for Best Musical Show Album over *Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk* (cause we all know Savion Glover dusted that boy's ass in the televised pat battle)? 18. Is videographer Paul Hunter (Biggie's "Hypnotize," Erykah Badu's "On and On") the new Hype Williams? 19. Speaking of Miss Badu, would we be less than righteous if we questioned why she insists on sipping a cup of herbal tea and chewing an incense stick during every performance? 20. And who is the hiding under that headwrap?

tant coaches got called for an interview—but didn't get hired? 13. Really, now. *Waterbed* How? *Waterbed*? 14. Why are people sweat-

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THE DETAILS

VIBESyle: "Love Pool"

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Black cutaway bikini by Todd Oldham \$277 available at Todd Oldham stores, N.Y.C., L.A., and Miami and Macy's, Herald Square; black wave lycra trunk by F8 \$50 available at X Collection, L.A., Amalgamated, N.Y.C., and Jeffrey Alan, Miami Beach.

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Navy swimsuit with one strap \$60 by Massimo Swim available at the Jerrie Shop, Cedarhurst, N.Y.C., Ego Key West, Key West, Fla., and Pilar's, San Diego, Calif.

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Black string bikini and mesh tee sold as a set \$64 by GUESS available at GUESS Boutiques.

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Black bikini with silver studs \$130 by Moschino available at the Mirage, Las Vegas, Oxygen, Bal Harbour, Fla., and Great Shops, Roslyn, N.Y.C.; white swim trunks with stripes \$57.50 by DKNY available at Marshall Field's, Burlington's, Macy's, East and Northeast.

VIBEFashion: "New Wave"

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ST-Comp spring wetsuit \$175 by Quiksilver available at Surf Sports, Newport Beach, Calif., WRV, Virginia Beach, Va., Warm, Warragant, R.I.

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White cotton fitted capsule knit top \$23 by Unionbay available at Dr. Jay's, Canal Jeans, and May Company stores, navy boardshort \$44 by Massimo available at Liberty House, Hawaii, Macy's, East, and Massimo Supply, Pasadena and Costa Mesa, CA; gray Heather Chenierade T-shirt \$20 by CG Design available at Infinity and Metro, N.Y.C.; black bikini with white piping \$50 by GUESS swimwear available at GUESS Boutiques nationwide; gray cotton T-shirt \$15.50 by Club (for store information, call 800 ITS-CLUB) white zip-up top with stripes \$58 by Verso available at Macy's, Transit, N.Y.C., and Baseline, L.A.; white canvas utility pant \$40 by Unionbay available at Dr. Jay's, Canal Jeans, and May Company stores, black bikini with white piping \$70 by GUESS swimwear available at GUESS Boutiques nationwide, black nylon warm-up pant \$78 by Verso available at Macy's, Transit, N.Y.C., and Baseline, L.A.; white terry cloth pullover \$64 by GUESS available at GUESS Boutiques nationwide, orange boardshort with white tie \$86 by GUESS swimwear available at Bloomingdale's, nationwide, and GUESS Boutiques, nationwide, Freestyle Engineered stripe velour top \$28 by Quiksilver available at Urban Clothing, San Francisco, OMG, N.Y.C., and Mickey Finn's, Berlin, CT; blue short \$50 by Ocean Pacific available at Kohl's, Milwaukee, Robinson's, U.S. Mail, Memphis, and Benjamin's, Tx; orange hooded anorak \$18 by DKNY Kids available at Bloomingdale's nationwide, white boardshort with orange stripes \$64 by F8 available at X Collection, L.A., Antique Boutique, N.Y.C., and Jeffrey Allen, Miami Beach; black boardshort \$58 by Verso available at Macy's, Transit, N.Y.C., and Baseline, L.A.

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Navy halter two-piece bikini \$60 by Massimo Swim available at Ron Jon's, Cocoa Beach, Fla., Brave New World, Point Pleasant, N.J., and Gone Bananas, San Diego; red/white/black bikini with bandeau top \$68 by Tommy by Tommy Hilfinger available at Bloomingdale's, Macy's, West, and Mercantile.

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Khaki zipfront top \$52 by Level 7 available at Aero/Unstitch, Chicago, By George, Austin, Tx., and Freedom, Denver and Boulder, Colo.

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Orange terry cloth top \$46 by Massimo available at Nordstrom's, L.A., Bloomingdale's nationwide, and Fred Segal, L.A.; white corduroy short \$45 by GUESS available at GUESS Boutiques nationwide

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Light green tank \$20 by CG Design available at Infinity and Metro, N.Y.C., white short with reflective waistband \$50 by Verso available at Macy's, Transit, N.Y.C., and Baseline, L.A.; khaki cotton cargo short \$36 by Unionbay available at Dr. Jay's, Canal Jeans, and May Company stores.

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PROPS

Dizzy gets busy,
January 12, 1959

Art hides in the darkness of life until innovators, true craftsmen, break through with their light and bring their art form to new ground. Dizzy Gillespie was one such innovator. Born John Birks Gillespie on October 21, 1917, he was 12 when he first picked up the trumpet. He would become not only one of the world's finest trumpet players and composers but also one of its truest teachers.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Dizzy understood the importance of documentation. He regularly notated the nuances of his unique music style, ensuring the preservation of his contributions to jazz's foundation for generations to come.

Throughout the '40s and '50s, alongside Kenny Clarke, Bird, and Monk, Gillespie bounced his notes around and sired bebop in the process—bebop, that is. Although people insisted the “fad” was dimming, Dizzy continued to grow. By 1947, he was pioneering Latin jazz, tingeing his music with the Afro-Cuban influence of percussionist Chano Pozo.

Whereas Miles Davis and Charlie Parker represented the infamously moodier side of jazz, Gillespie was a constant bearer of light amid the somewhat heavy tone that had come to define the music. He regularly injected his shows with humor, smiles, and wit, reminding listeners of the whimsical nature of their all-too-often stoic lives.

Listen to “Manteca.” Listen to “Night in Tunisia.” Listen to what sounds like a clumsy accuracy that only Dizzy could achieve. That sound of notes walking a tightrope. That sound between hitting a note and not. The slipping and sliding, on and around, in and out of sound.

On 1961's “Africana,” listen to the lions roaring; regal elephants calling other animals to order; bees humming; snakes crawling. The more you listen, the more the music seduces you further into the jungle. Deeper into the bush. Close your eyes. Be still and follow. You couldn't have a more trusted guide than Dizzy.

On January 7, 1993, Gillespie's eyes closed into the perpetuity of another world. Never again would his trumpet be filled with his breath, his life. His dexterity with this brass encasement had served as a conduit for his energy. And this world is truly darker without it; a quieter place without Dizzy's sound of light.

Lesley-Ann Brown

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